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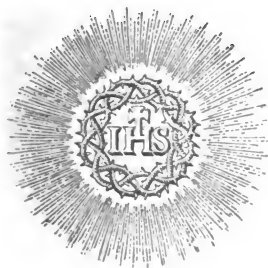
Maidens of hallowed names

Charles Piccirillo, P Grégoire



A. M. D. G.

MAIDENS
OF
HALLOWED NAMES.
TWELFTH THOUSAND.



COLLEGE OF THE SACRED HEART,
(JESUIT HOUSE OF STUDIES,)
WOODSTOCK, MD.

1882.

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Published with the approbation of the

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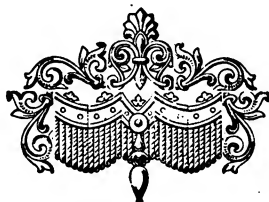
TO YOU,
MAIDENS OF PURE LIVES,
THE JOY OF CHRISTIAN HOMES,
THE HOPE OF SOUND SOCIETY,
THE TENDER CARE OF MOTHER CHURCH,
THIS LITTLE BOOK IS OFFERED.
HERE YOU WILL FIND A SAINTLY MODEL:
TRY TO BECOME HER IMAGE.

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P R E F A C E .

THIS little volume is written almost exclusively for young ladies. It embraces the lives of saintly maidens, who either in the home-life of girlhood, or engaged in different avocations, and surrounded by different circumstances, withstood the trials and overcame the temptations of the world, and preserved to the end their virginity and their purity of heart.

They are lives, it is true, from which lessons may be learned by all, from the simple child to the serious matron, from the worldly-minded votary of society to the prayerful nun in the seclusion of the cloister ; but they are here presented chiefly to young women who, more than others, wish for good counsel and good example, in order that they may learn how dear to Heaven is their spotless purity, and what means they should employ in order to keep that purity always unsullied in the midst of surrounding dangers.

Not all have the grace of vocation to the religious state, nor should all direct their life to that end. "The spirit breathes where it will," and without the divine whisper their efforts would be useless, and their hopes only built up to be

broken. But all can and should aim at perfection in the life which God wishes them to lead. It is along that life that all the blessings which God has in store for them will be scattered, and only that life will God ever be willing to crown.

Now, wherever it may be, whether in wealth or poverty, honor or obscurity, comfort or distress, there is, among the many beautiful virgins whom the Church venerates for their sanctity, some model for that life, some perfect pattern of its perfection. To gather and present some of these models, so that every young reader may select according to her taste, and shape her conduct according to the pattern, is an object which was not thought unworthy.

If our young Catholic women of America — our Children of Mary, our Sodalists of the Blessed Virgin, and the many who give some serious thought to their spiritual welfare, accept this little book in the spirit in which it is written, and choose from it some saint whom they will love more dearly and imitate more closely, the object of the little volume will have been accomplished and its mission fulfilled.

May it be to them in some way what the angel was to Our Blessed Lady in the Annunciation — a means employed by Almighty God to reveal to them the secrets of His love and the designs which He has upon their souls.

WOODSTOCK COLLEGE, HOWARD CO., MD.,

Feast of the Annunciation, 1881.

INTRODUCTION.

TO THE YOUNG READER :

MY DEAR CHILD,

In presenting this little book to you I wish to tell you how dear it should be to you. For your sake it was written and published; and if you only learn to love it, the indifference of all others will be held of little account.

It comes to you full of kindness and full of cheerfulness, for it comes to remind you of your excellence and your power, and to teach you how to exert over others an influence much greater than any which even the cleverest woman or the strongest man can wield.

Perhaps you do not know that from the very beginning of Christianity the church has watched over the tender years of her children with a special care and affection.—And in doing so, she has only done the will of her Divine Master and imitated His example.

Our Blessed Lord himself loved the young with the most sincere and ardent love. While on earth it was His great pleasure to be in their society, to talk to them and teach them the lessons of virtue and the paths of a perfect life. He loved them for themselves—for their innocent hearts, and pure souls and winning ways. He said that it was His

delight to be with them, and He forbade others to hinder them from coming to Him, because they reminded Him of those whom He knew and loved in Heaven.

Again, He gave them as a model for all mankind, and told great strong men that they could never enter into the kingdom of Heaven unless they became like unto His little children.

And do you think that this love and regard was only for the youth of His time? Oh, no! His infinite charity extended even to you, and his love went forth through hundreds of years as fresh and warm as it seemed to those who were gathered at his feet. He loved you far back in the eternal dawn. He has watched over you with fondest affection in your infancy and childhood, and through all your school-days. It was His love that made itself known in that of your parents, relatives, friends, teachers, and most of all, in the assiduous care with which your guardian angel has guided you along every step of your life-path. And even now He sends this little book to you in order that you may the more closely watch over your soul, and not betray its virtues into the hands of vice.

No one ever knew so well as Our Lord the beauty of your soul. He saw it in its origin, in its nature, in all its tendencies and possible developments. He saw it cleansed from sin and robed in His divine grace, and adorned with beautiful virtue, and prepared for an eternity of bliss in the company of saints and angels. It was to Him infinitely more than the beauties of earth and sea and sky; and all these things were made only that you might the better know your own beauty and value, and be the better

pleased with Him and with His work, and give Him your heart in deeper love.

It is this that He asks of you — your heart ! “Child, give me thy heart !” He asks it for your sake and for His own. He knows that if he can win your heart’s love in this life, He can secure your soul’s happiness in the life to come. And He asks it for His own sake.—He wants it with its purity and its virtues. It is in these, my child, that all your beauty consists. The world’s vanity can only degrade you in His eyes, as indeed it should degrade you in your own.

The gleam of precious gems is beautiful, it is true, when compared with common clay or the black loam ; the bloom of the flower and the fragrance which it gives are sweet by contrast with other things which spring from the earth ; and the plumage of birds gives variety and makes the beauty of the world more beautiful still ; but all these things can add nothing to your beauty, and a vain use of them would be only a degradation of yourself in stooping to borrow your charms from banks of earth and brutes of the field.

They would become more beautiful if they could borrow from you, but you cannot become so by borrowing from them. If you could lend them your immortality with its life and love — oh ! then their beauty would not fade or perish ! The gleam would be like an Angel’s crown — never fading ; their bloom like the blush of health where sickness and sorrow cannot come ; and their many colors like the loveliness of the rainbow that spans not the sea after the storm, but the throne of God in the sweet stillness of eternity.

But you cannot give them this, my child ! Your immortality is your own. You cannot part with it, and God gave it to you because He loves you more than He loves them. And they can lend you nothing but dust and ashes ! Immortality, you know, walks over crushed and crumbled gems that once decked the bosom, blooms in fullest life over flowers long fallen from the hair and withered, and robes itself in colors that never fade or pass away.

And your beauty is precisely in your immortality ! It is this that makes you fit for God's divine grace, and the many virtues that come with that grace to adorn your soul,—yea, and to make you kin to Christ and to His Blessed Mother. It is the grace of Christ, my child, that makes more than beautiful your already beautiful immortality. What are blooms of flowers or gleams of gems, or songs of birds to your sanctified soul in the attitude of prayer ? Nothing ! Less than the shade of a shadow, not so much as the life of a dream !

But it is not only for your beauty and worth that Christ and his church love you. They love and cherish you for something more. There is in you a great moral power—the power of influence and persuasion.

Do you know what occurred during the Commune in Paris ? The saintly prisoners were going from their prison to the place of their martyrdom, and their enemies, hating God even more than men, refused them the last consolation of receiving Holy Communion. Some one was wanted who feared no danger, and who heeded no threat. And such a one came forth in the person of a young maiden. She took the little box containing the Blessed Sacrament,

and marching fearlessly through the ranks of the soldiers, entered the prison, and gave the holy martyrs the Viaticum for which they had so wished and prayed. Is it not true, then, that your power is sometimes stronger than that of men?

No law or legislation can accomplish what your wish and will can often achieve. Look at the little picture representing the dawn of holiness! Could any voice plead like those eyes? Could any pose or posture entreat like that attitude of prayer? No! because there you find innocence, earnestness, purity and love; and to the appeals of these the human, like the Divine heart, is ever open.

Even if your mission were limited to pleading for the poor only, would it not be glorious enough! This is one of the special pleasures of our Blessed Lady in Heaven, and she leaves its accomplishment upon earth to those of her clients who love her ardently and imitate her closely. But your power extends farther still, for prayer can reach beyond all bounds, and can embrace all that are in need.

What you must do, then, if you wish to be happy, is to cultivate purity of heart and innocence of life. You must not let your influence die without bearing fruit. There are hundreds of souls whose destiny is in your hands, hundreds of thrones in heaven awaiting your appointment of those who are to fill them for eternity.

Remember all the fulness of your life—the sweet and sinless days of your childhood, the pure affections of home, the bright promises you have made to yourself, and the high hopes you have cherished! Will you now let them perish through inactivity and indifference? Oh, no! Learn of the beautiful lives here placed before you that you have a

great work to do, and that you can do it easily, if you only imitate them. Learn that nothing is lost which is done for God, and that all is lost which is not done for Him. Here, in America, you have such a wide field in which to work for His glory. You can teach so much by your example, accomplish so much by your prayers !

How many conversions are daily wrought by the power of good example ! Even Saint Augustine, chained to earth by his vices and evil habits, was led into the ways of virtue by the example of pure maidenhood. He beheld a number of virgins marching before him, and heard a voice repeating: "Canst not thou do what these youths, what these maidens can do?" He blushed for shame at the remembrance of his sinful life, and through the example of these maidens he was converted.

Only study to keep the rules subjoined, and you will not only make yourself lovable in the eyes of God and man, but you will also be instrumental in calling many to the glory of God, while at the same time you will adorn your own crown with new and varied gems, whose brilliancy will not pass and whose worth will not perish.

RULES OF LIFE.

THOUGH I be still young, yet confiding in God's strength, illuminated with His light, fortified with His abundant graces, I promise to serve Him ever.

In order to secure the success of this irrevocable promise to God, I dedicate myself wholly to the Blessed Virgin, whom

I shall love and honor as my most tender mother ; and through her powerful intercession, I hope for grace and courage to keep the following resolutions :

1. I will never blush at the Gospel nor at its obligations: and whatever be my station in life, I shall never forget that before everything else I am a *Christian*.

2. Whenever I have a resolution to take, a plan to execute or a work to perform, I shall consider first of all, *if my character as a Christian, if my duties as a Christian, will allow me.*

3. As a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, I shall be always ready to defend my divine Master, preventing men from offending Him as far as I can, especially by my example and my prayers.

4. If I shall be so happy as to suffer insult and ridicule for my fidelity to my faith, I shall bear in mind how the Apostles *accounted themselves unworthy to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ* — and I shall pray for those who despise me.

5. When tempted, I shall invoke the aid of the Blessed Virgin, and pressing my medal to my heart, I shall say: “For a passing pleasure shall I sacrifice the glory promised me in heaven?” Having received so abundantly of God’s gifts shall I offend Him? No, Lord, no — death were preferable.

My most tender Mother, Mary, remember that I am thy child. Oh ! Let me die rather than that the beauty of my soul should ever be stained with any sin. Amen.

VIRGINITY.

WHEN our Divine Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, came to establish Himself as Saviour and Teacher of the world, to give us a new rule of rectitude and lead us in His own appointed way to Heaven, He seems to have taught through His whole life, both by precept and example, that we would reach the highest possibility of Christian perfection only in proportion as we could and would rise above the world, worldly, and the earth, earthy. Many times He said as much explicitly, and the whole tendency of His public teachings as well as the eloquent lessons of His silent life, leave no doubt that the grades of perfection in His school are determined by the measure of our freedom from bondage in the service of the world. He assured us that we could not serve two masters, and that our allegiance to the one would detract from our devotion to the other. He told us that He was not of the world, nor was His kingdom, nor were His disciples. On this principle are based all the tenets of the new law, all the rules of Christian holiness.

But at the same time He made a marked distinction between precept and counsel. For them that live only by the former, He left a play-ground large and roomy, where human nature and its passions are less restrained, where the world can enter and take a moderate and lawful part in the ways of life, without injury to the soul and without insult to His service. On the other hand, for those who are called to live by the latter no such provision is made, and all their lessons may be reduced to one:

“Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect !”

Now, of all the virtues that belong to the life of holy counsel, there is none so beautiful, so marked, so peculiarly His own as the virtue of virginity. This is emphatically His own. It is His in its institution and beginning; His in love and favor; His in its rich and abundant fruits.

There is a feeling in the heart of every one who has reached the ripeness of manhood or womanhood which exerts a great influence upon human life. It is not so much as a cool and calculating judgment, and yet it is more than a mere impulse of instinct; it is, in a measure, left to the mercy of imagination, and still it is subject to the powers of the mind, though it is more impressionable than the sense of either sight or sound. It comes with the dawn of life's fullness and changes all that is past. Childhood's pleasures become a mere memory, the hopes of youth take a deeper and more vivid coloring, and thoughts of old age with its cares and sorrows and bitter lessons of experience are banished. This is the feeling of love. God gave it to us for a great and noble purpose, and it has had much to do in the providence which provides for the success of the human family. He paid it due regard in the creation, and satisfied all its reasonable demands; He sanctified it in the redemption, and raised it to the supernatural plane in the holy sacrament of Matrimony. Indeed, He made it symbolic of His own love for His divine bride, the Church.

Our Lord, in establishing his school of perfect spirituality, dealt with this passion in a most peculiar way. He taught by word and example that he wished to smooth away its rude features in some of his chosen ones, and soften it down to a more spiritual emotion. To do this He instituted the virginal life.

The doctrine of the Church, on the subject of virginity, may be summed up in a few words from Saint Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians. He says to them: "The unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit. But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your profit, not to cast a snare upon you, but for that which is decent, and which may give you power to attend upon the Lord without impediment. The virgin that is given in marriage doeth well, but she that is given not doeth better. More blessed shall she be, if she so remain, according to my counsel, and I think that I have the spirit of God."

No words could express more clearly the whole doctrine of the Church concerning virginity. She teaches that the state of virginity is a more perfect state than that of matrimony, she encourages those to follow it who feel that they are called to it, and she leaves all free to do as they please.

The virginal life is peculiarly the life of Christ. He it was, the virgin son of a virgin mother, that created it upon the earth. It was the foundation stone of the great Christian work—the first link in the chain of the Redeemer's mysteries. He sanctified poverty in the stable of Bethlehem, He sanctified fasting in the desert, and prayer in the Garden of Olives, but before all these He sanctified virginity in the cottage of Nazareth, and wrought it into His own nature as Saviour of the world and Model of mankind. It was a thing utterly and entirely new. Israel had not known it. Just as her shepherds wished, as they watched their flocks, that

in their day the expectation of nations might be realized, and the Prince of Peace rise up in their midst, just so her young maidens lived in the hope that they might at least be in the direct ancestral line of the Mighty One, who, as their prophets told them, was to spring from the house of David. Virginity to them had not the charms of a virtue. The highest hopes of their holiest ambition led them away from it. Jehovah had not taught that lesson. If we except the Vestals, it was almost unknown, too, among all the nations of the pagan world, and a spirit of profligacy had gone abroad and ruined the very life of society.

But the new law giver came and all was changed. Virginity was looked upon with admiration and cherished with a Christian pride. The fathers of the Church in all ages tell us how it flourished in every kingdom and in every clime. It was limited in its growth to no age, no condition. It sprang up everywhere and blossomed to its fulness. It was found in the royal elegance of time-worn palaces, and in the want and poverty of the poorest human life; in the busy thoroughfares of great cities and in the desert caves and holes of the rock.

So early as the middle of the 3rd century, Saint Cyprian of Alexandria says of the virgins :

“They are the flower of the Church’s growth ; the grace of the spirit finds in them its beauty and delicacy ; they are our pride and bloom ; in them praise and honor have their perfect and incorrupt work ; they are God’s image reflecting the Lord’s sanctity ; the more illustrious portion of Christ’s flock. In them exults, in them beauteously flowers the glorious fecundity of our mother the Church,

and the more virginity adds to its number the more that mother's joy increases."

Some years later Saint Athanasius wrote :

"The Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, after becoming man for us, and annulling death, and freeing our race from the bondage of corruption, in addition to all His other gifts bestowed upon us this, to have upon earth the image of Angelic sanctity—the virgin life. At least those who possess this virtue, the Catholic Church is wont to call the Brides of Christ. When the heathens around us behold these, they look up to them with admiration as shrines of the Word. For in real truth no where is this sacred and heavenly profession carried out save among us Christians alone. And this is above all a very great proof that real and genuine piety exists among us only."

And a little later, Saint Augustine exclaims :

"Look, O Lord, upon these troops of virgins, of holy youths and maidens ! In thy church this race was brought up; for thee burst forth its vigorous bloom from the mother's breast ; there it lisped its first accents in thy name,—thy name which it drank in as the milk of its infancy. . . . These offered their vow, and for the kingdom of Heaven shut themselves off from marriage, not through dread of thy threats, but through love of thy promises."

Yes, the virginal life is peculiarly Christ's, and He created it as a state for the perfect—for those who were to be united to Him more closely than others. He preached for all from the Mountain of Beatitudes, and bade us be perfect in those virtues. They are suited to all ages and all conditions of Christian life, and it was His wish that in some other degree all should arrive at that perfection.

But the inheritance of His virginity He gave only to His chosen ones. He chose a virgin for a precursor. He sent the Angel of the Desert before His face to prepare His way and make straight His paths — him whose voice was heard in the wilderness, who was great before the Lord, who was filled with the Holy Ghost in his mother's womb, and called the Prophet of the Most High to enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and direct their footsteps in the way of peace. He chose a virgin for a mother — the one that is all fair and in whom there is no spot or stain, coming up from the desert flowing with delights — the mother of holy hope and of beautiful love.

And He chose, too, a virgin for the companion of His toils and sufferings, and for the bosom friend of His Sacred Heart. He made him the last of the Prophets, the last of the Apostles, the last of the Evangelists, that a virgin might give the last, fine finishing touch to all their work, like the perfect artist who alone dares to touch the almost perfect stone. And He gave him a name, too, that will forever separate him from the rest of creatures, be they saints or angels, that will forever mark him as the great wonder in the economy of man's redemption, that makes him in the mystic sense the symbol of the prayer of earth, and the purity of Heaven. He was the *Beloved Disciple*, he was the disciple whom Jesus *loved*!

Our Divine Lord made no secret of His partiality for this virgin disciple. He did not make him the everlasting head of His church, but He poured out upon him the sweetness of personal, individual love, in far greater measure than upon others. He was one of those whom Jesus took apart to

see the glory of His transfiguration on the mountain ; it was he to whom Our Lord whispered at the last supper, and told who the traitor was that was to betray Him ; it was he that first recognized his Master, when after His resurrection He appeared to the disciples on the sea-shore, and when the Lord had foretold how Peter should die, that apostle turning saw St. John standing near and asked what would become of him ; and He answered : “ so I will have him to remain until I come ; what is it to thee ? ”

See the loving partiality ! “ So I will have him to remain until I come ; what is it to thee ? ” You shall all die the death of anguish, but he — he shall remain ! You, Peter, shall be crucified, Paul shall be beheaded, Matthew shall be murdered by the Parthians, Mark shall be dragged to death over the stony streets of Alexandria, Luke shall die nailed to an olive tree, and for the others, too, will come the triumph of the world, and the hour of the powers of darkness, but not for him ! — he shall remain ! — what is it to thee ?

He shall remain in spite of the world ! The head that I pillowed upon my bosom shall never droop from a cross. He may be hunted like the timid stag and hide in mountain caves, but he shall remain ! — he may be cast into a caldron of boiling oil, but I will have my arms around him and he shall suffer no harm ! — he may be banished to Patmos the lonesome island of the sea, but I and my angels will come to him and speak to him of Heaven, and unfold to his gaze the wonders of the city of God. The world shall never triumph over my virgin disciple ; his virgin flesh shall never be torn with whips and nails ; and a violent death

shall never leave its agony on his brow ! He shall remain :

And this love was mutual. There was a perfect union between Christ and His virgin disciple. Saint John followed his master more closely than any of the others. His devotion was constant. He was with Him when He went to pray in the Garden of Olives, and he alone clung to his master through the dark, dark days and nights of His passion, and alone of all the disciples climbed Calvary with Him, and stood by Him in His agony, and heard the thuds of the nails, and saw them split His hands and feet. The virgin disciple followed the virgin Master up to and into the very tomb !

And if ever love was tenderly expressed, or devotion bountifully rewarded, it was in Christ's words on the cross, in His last will and testament made for His virgin disciple : "Son, behold thy Mother !"

Then and there, under the shadow of the cross, Saint John, more than ever, was the expression of the Church's purity and holiness. It seemed like the very triumph of Christ's love ! Truth and holiness were the marks which He wished to make indelible for His Church, and as He chose Peter to represent the one, so now He chooses John to represent the other. Peter was the rock upon which Christ built His Church, and of which He said that the gates of hell should not prevail against it ; John was made the loving voice of that Church of which Christ said that whatever it should ask the Father in His name it should be given. Peter's strength lay in the wisdom of God which should teach him all truth and be with him till the consummation of the world ; John's was in the love of God,

which he imbibed from the Sacred Heart when he leaned his head upon the divine bosom.

It was necessary that the truth of the Church should remain unshaken, hence Christ prayed for Peter that his faith fail not, because Satan had asked to sift him like wheat; it was necessary that the prayer of the Church should be a mighty and an efficacious power, hence Christ identified John with His Sacred Heart and with His virgin Mother, because He knew that united with their intercession the voice of prayer could move every throne in Heaven!

And so "Son behold thy Mother!"—thy virgin Mother, the expression of all purity! I give her to thee because thou, too, art a virgin, and in thy virginity thou, too, art my beloved! Take her to thine own. Thou who art purity and holiness canst prize the same; to thee can I entrust it all! Yea, all!—all that my grace can bestow, all that my love can love best, all that my virtues can make and adorn! Take her to thine own! "Son, behold thy Mother!"—Thy mother, My mother, our mother—the virgin mother of virgin sons, of me and my beloved! Take her to thine own!

Was ever confidence so confident, or favor so favorable, or love so lovely? Why it looks like a trust laid upon virginity, which makes it responsible for the perfection of all purity and all holiness. Both of these made up his mother, and that mother He gave to His virgin disciple, precisely because that disciple was a virgin.

And oh, how this seal of his love has gone down through the years! How this last testament, written in the blood of

the Sacred Heart, has enriched the offspring of the generations! What would the church be to any of us without the sweet virgin Mother of God, given to us through the virgin disciple? How white and cold would be the walls of her temples! How bleak, if not blank, would be the memory of our christian childhood! How dreary, if not dark, would be the life-path of our future without Mary, our Mother, the virgin. Sure enough, Christ gave her to you and me through His virgin disciple on Calvary!

And what a posterity has sprung from the love of the virgin Master for His virgin disciple, in the legacy of His Virgin Mother! Of old, the propagation of the children of Adam was less dependent upon spiritual developement. All things, both in the physical and moral world, were in a great measure material. Mind had but little to do, and matter had much. Life was long and limbs were strong, and greatness was measured by strength.

But with the coming of our Lord a great reaction set in, and men began to disregard all such trifling gifts of inferior nature and to labor for the fruits of the spiritual life. They saw that those fruits were to fall from virginity! The virginal state, which had sprung up like a very "tree beside the waters," began to let its fruits fall. They filled the caves and caverns of the East, they gave bloom and blossom to the deserts, they grew mellow in the monasteries and in the old Lauras of early times, and they had much to do — those fruits of virginity — with changing the taste of a barbaric age, and filling the world with the outcome, not of matter, but of spirit; not of human beings, but of Christian people!

And naturally enough, because it is the virgin that begets

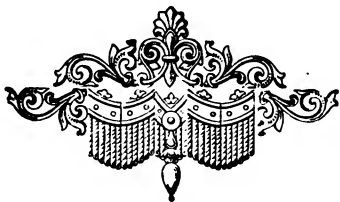
the virgin. The pure, spiritual and eternal life, begotten by the All-father in His intelligence and His love, is reflected in this moral propagation of spirit by spirit! The Divine Son is the offspring of perfect thought; the Holy Ghost, of perfect love. And just so the birth of Christian children is a thing not of matter, but of spirit; not an inheritance from Adam, the father of the flesh; but from Christ, the father of the spirit.

Hence it is not strange that in the Church the state of virginity is inseparable from high vocations. She professes to satisfy our noblest aspirations, and make us conformable in the highest degree to our rule of righteousness and rectitude — the holiness of God, and she professes moreover, to pass on down the years, ever young and vigorous in her powers, ever prolific in her offspring, like the mustard seed of the Gospel, filling the world with Christian children, multiplying the fruit of her spiritual transmission like the stars of Heaven, and the sands by the sea.

Nor is it strange that, in the Christian world, there are young maidens who feel that their hearts are made for higher and purer affections than the fleeting and fickle love of man. Sometimes they hide themselves in religious seclusion; but this is a matter of choice. There are others who walk the paths of worldly life, but they are not of the world. God has set His seal upon them, and marked them as His own. They mingle in the mighty crowd and the charms of life and love surround them, but their spirit moves in a higher sphere, and their eyes are fixed upon other treasures. Not many can imitate them, but all are forced to bestow upon them that admiration which moral greatness commands,

and that halo of attraction with which man crowns every object which his ambition cannot win; they go through life only as a path to Heaven; they see their better life and better love before them.

In the garden of the soul there is a flower that blooms and blossoms in exquisite paleness. It is delicate in the texture of its leaf and fragile in the stem that bears it. The least touch of even a gloved hand can leave a dark and growing spot upon it which may prove the beginning of its decay. It must be nursed with every care, for it withers at a breath; but it is heavenly in its beauty, heavenly in its growth, heavenly in its fragrance, heavenly in the privilege it gives to those who have kept it in its unfading bloom; for in the city of God there is one path where none can walk, but those that wear it, and these are they that sing the new canticle before the throne of God, and follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.



SAINT AGNES.

I.



HE Piazza Navona is one of the largest in Rome. It possesses many points of interest, and there are few travellers who come upon it for the first time without deeming it worth the while to stop and admire the broad basin of Bernini's fountain, its central rock and towering obelisk of granite, and its colossal figures representing the Nile, Plata, Danube and Ganges. It was once the circus of Alexander Severus; later, it was the public market-place and the place of veriest shop-keeping; where, on Wednesday mornings, you could purchase almost anything conceivable, from old iron to an oil painting. Later still, its appearance was altogether changed by the Holy Father Pius IX., who looked favorably upon the place, removed the market, put an end to the shop-keeping, and planned such improvements as were calculated to make of it an ornament for Rome.

One part of the Piazza is occupied by a church which is among the finest in the city, and which has of late years been richly embellished. The front is of travertine, adorned

with pillars. The interior, which is in the shape of a Greek cross, is incrustcd with marble, and decorated with eight Corinthian columns; while the cupola, which is beautifully designed, is radiant with frescoes. One arm of the cross forms the entrance; the other three supply as many chapels, the high altar being placed opposite the door.

Strangers have often wondered that so much beauty and richness should be still further beautified and enriched in such a place as the Piazza; but on hearing that the church is dedicated to Saint Agnes, their curiosity is changed into reverence, and they have gladly acknowledged the beautiful temple to be nothing more than what is due to one of the loveliest little saints in the calendar. Her story has been often told, but it will bear many repetitions. We never tire of purity and youth and beauty. It is true they are fragile, but they are lovely while they last, like dew on the flowers; and when they come to us, together with firm character and fixed principles of goodness, they assert their right to be perpetuated. In Saint Agnes they are forever crystallized. They are the gems in her crown of martyrdom, for which she purchased perpetuity with her blood. Even Saint Jerome with all his austerity, admired them from his cave in the desert; Saint Ambrose, busied with the great affairs of Church and State, wrote eulogies of them to his sister; and Saint Augustine rested awhile from controversy and let his eloquence become young and brilliant again from writing on so brilliant a theme. Not much is to be told; but what she did was done well, and the few acts recorded of her are among the greatest in the records of human life.

It was in the beginning of the fourth century. The last

persecution of Diocletian was raging throughout the length and breadth of the Roman Empire, and on every side were wreck and ruin. The temples were turned into court-rooms, altars became tribunals, and every statue of every false god stood waiting to be incensed by Christian hands. The prisons were full, the roads were covered with mutilated bodies; and the bones of the victims, reduced to ashes, were scattered to the winds. Different provinces had different modes of torment. In Pontus, it was the wheel; in Mesopotamia, hot coals; in Arabia, the axe; melted lead in Cappadocia; and in Rome itself, fire and the sword. No one was spared who refused to sacrifice to the gods. Age and youth, mother and child, master and slave, suffered alike. In Thrace and Pannonia, bishops, priests and deacons were burned alive; at Aquila the consular family of Anicius was put to death; at Bologna, Agricola and his slave, Vitalis, were crucified. No part of Italy escaped the persecution, and nowhere was the persecution more bitter and more prolonged than in Rome, where Saint Agnes suffered and died.

Our Saint was of noble birth, was born and bred in the midst of wealth and influence, and was possessed of many personal attractions. God had poured out upon her a divine beauty. The grace of figure, and the charm of feature, and the glow of innocence, seem to have rested upon her like the favors of Heaven on Nazareth. She was only a child in years, not yet fifteen; but she was a woman in devotion and the deep springs of love, and she had given that love to the Heavenly Bridegroom.

Enjoying so many natural gifts, together with that refinement which Christianity lends both to mind and manners,

the Christian maiden soon became an object of admiration to the young noblemen of Rome, who rivalled one another in efforts to win her favor. Chief among these was the son of Sempronius, the prefect of the city. But all was in vain. They might have her prayers and good-will, but not her affections ; her hand she would give them in friendship, in love, never. But they would multiply her wealth, and she should be decked with the rarest gems of Southern seas, and the luxuries of the East should come at her call ! She cared not for these ; she had treasures in Heaven ! Then would she not at least be a Virgin of Vesta, and watch the consecrated fire, and let her young life be their prayer in the holy temple, and float away with coming years like incense to the gods ! No, she knelt at another, a purer altar, and her incense could be only a Christian's burning love.

Thus, for a long time was she besieged by suitors, only to be found impregnable to all their arts and importunities. At last their disappointment was turned into revenge, and hatred took the place of the love which they had professed. They accused her to the Governor of being a Christian. Threats and torments, they thought, would triumph where promises and allurements had failed. But as dangers increased, her spirit of divine love soared to greater height, and her determination became stronger than ever. While left in peace and in the security of home, though she had responded to their addresses firmly, she had done so kindly, and with the gentleness and courtesy of a Christian maiden, nobly born, answering only that she could not wed, as she was already affianced to the Divine Bridegroom ; but now that she was dragged forth by rude soldiers, now that fires

were lit to frighten her, and instruments of torture displayed to wrest from her the promise which she would not give, she felt all the strength of injured innocence, and the courage of the Christian martyr. So far from fear was she, that she expressed joy at the sight, laughed at the executioners, and of her own accord took her place on the rack and declared herself ready for their vengeance. But the Governor hesitated.

Is complete submission, so long as it is without personal hate or defiance, a tyrant's surest conqueror? Does tyranny, like selfishness, need at least some little opposition before it can be called into action? The selfish man, if you gladly and cheerfully yield all to him, will often give you a part, and, so far as he is capable, will expand a little in the giving; for the feeling of generosity, which to you is habitual, to him is new and strange, and his character is enlarged, and his life sweetened for the moment by its influence. Is it so with a tyrant? Does he relent for a while and soften into a momentary mercy when his victim sweetly submits, and looks kindly into his eyes, and seems even to smile an approval; or is man, brutalized by cruelty, so close akin to the fiend as "to hate most those whom he has deeply wronged?" At any rate, the Governor declined to give the command, and the life of the virgin was for a time spared. But only for a short time.

II.

AFTER much persuasion and many threats, to all of which the Saint remained indifferent, the Governor, fearing that

he had compromised his authority by threatening so much and executing so little, thought to extricate himself by an expedient which would sanction his leniency if she complied, and, if she refused, would justify further cruelty.

It must be remembered that the chief and original cause of her summons and arrest was not her profession of Christianity ; it was her refusal to give her hand in marriage. Consent was, therefore, to be forced from her. But as all efforts to this end had failed, nothing remained but either to release her, or to continue the prosecution by introducing the charge of Christianity. In the event of her release, the tyrant must acknowledge his failure; and tyrants, you know, must never fail, or, if they do, they must never acknowledge it. Nothing was left him, therefore, but to advance the charge of Christianity, and demand of her to sacrifice to the idols. This she positively refused to do, and being brought by compulsion before the false gods, stood firm in her refusal, "moving not a hand," says Saint Ambrose, "except to make the sign of the cross."

Foiled in this, his second attempt to conquer the will of the young virgin, the tyrant resorted to a means which he felt sure would bring her to submission. He threatened to place her in the midst of crime, where her modesty would be shocked and her virtue sorely tried, where spirits of evil would be her teachers, and shame would cover her cheek. She was accordingly stripped of her garments and sent to the common brothel, the *lupanar*, of the circus.

The steps near the chapel of Saint Agnes lead to the place of shame to-day. The *lupanar*, or at least the part of it which still remains, consists of two rooms. It was formerly

on a level with the ground of the Piazza; but, like the other parts of the city, the Piazza has been raised.

Here she was exposed to the gaze of profligate youths, and left to the mercy of their passions. God protected her, however, and at sight of the Saint they were filled with awe and reverence. Only one dared approach her, and he, in his first rude act, was stricken blind and thrown helpless to the ground, while Agnes, who had retired as far as possible from them, was singing hymns of love and constancy to her Lord and Master in heaven: "I am espoused to Him whom the Angels serve, whose beauty the sun and moon admire. With Him will I keep my plighted faith, to Him I am wholly devoted. He has encircled my wrist with a bracelet of jewels, and my neck with a necklace of gems!"

The unfortunate man was afterwards brought to the Saint, whose prayers restored him to sight and health, as they had preserved her immaculate in the midst of danger.

The Governor was exasperated. He now determined upon her death. A funeral pyre was reared, and thousands gathered around to look upon the innocent victim and watch the awful scene of her agony. She came forth in all her loveliness of person and character. Her flowing hair, miraculously grown, fell almost to her feet, and hung kindly round her like a shroud, shielding her from the rude gaze of the rabble, as it had before shielded her from that of the profligates in the *lupanar*. Her step was modest, but true and firm; her manner kind and cheerful; and the multitude wondered that one so young, so fair, could be so brave. "More cheerfully," says Saint Augustine, "did she go forth to her execution, than others go to their wedding."

Once more the scion of Roman royalty knelt before her, and offered her again her life for her hand. She answered only: "I love Christ, whose mother was a virgin, whose foster-father was a virgin, whose virgin choirs sing sweet songs to me now. Into His chamber will I enter, whose love does not defile, whose caress chastens, in whose embrace I shall be a virgin indeed! What is the body after all? Let it perish, since it can be pleasing to eyes from which I shrink! Let it perish, since its beauty can only make me blush! Let it perish since it becomes a temptation to sin! Yes, perish the body, but live and be pure, O my soul! Live and be pure in the love of my Heavenly Bridegroom whose eyes turn away from vanity, and rest only on the pure!" Then in the midst of flames, with hands extended and eyes lifted towards heaven, she prayed: "O my Heavenly Spouse, so omnipotent, so adorable, so much to be loved! For Thee I have borne all insults and withstood all threats; for Thee I have walked in impure places with immaculate feet! Lo, I come to Thee now!—to Thee whom I have loved, whom I have sought, whom I have longed for, ever!"

The flames leaped high above her and enveloped her entire body, but by miraculous favor they left her unharmed, and when the fire died away the spectators were filled with wonder and delight at finding the virgin child so singularly preserved. Her persecutors, however, were not to be outdone, and one of the soldiers was ordered to despatch her with a sword. With a single stroke he severed her head from her body, amid the sobs and groans of the multitude.

III.

HER relatives buried her in a vineyard about a mile from the city on the Nomentan Road. For a long time her father and mother watched and wept over her grave, and one night, while they were keeping the holy vigil, their angel child, accompanied by a choir of virgins, appeared to them and bade them weep for her no more, assuring them that she was happy in heaven with Him whom on earth she had loved with all her heart.

Some years afterwards, the Emperor Constantine's daughter, Constantia, while suffering from an incurable malady, visited the tomb of the Saint. She was at the time a pagan. Agnes appeared to her and said: "Be constant, Constantia! Believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and He will heal thee!" Sure enough her health was restored, and she was baptized with many of her household. At her request, her father built on that spot the church of "St. Agnes outside the walls." The body of the Saint lies immediately under the high altar. In this church two lambs are blessed every year. Out of their wool the palliums are woven which are then blessed by the Pope and placed for the night on the tombs of the Apostles. Afterwards His Holiness sends them to Archbishops and Metropolitans as a mark of his friendship and of their apostolical power. The innocent lambs are a beautiful reminder of Agnes, the lamb of the Lamb of God.

In taking leave of our Saint we recommend, in her name, to the readers of this little sketch, the following short sermon. It was preached long ago in the times in which St. Agnes lived, but perhaps it will suit the young women of the

nineteenth century as well as it did those of the fourth. The bent of human nature is ever the same :

“Oh ! in youth learn to love the beauty of virtue. Be not deceived by appearances. Not love itself, but that which debases love is forbidden. Do you wish to love ? Then love wisdom and live so as to learn it. It will not seem cold if you possess your souls in peace, and it will come to your aid when all other friends and forces fail. As the lustful eye looks for ornaments to adorn the body, so wisdom seeks to adorn the soul. Alone, and of your own store of natural gifts, you cannot furnish the one great charm which is needed to give them splendor, for the greatest wealth is poor when confident and proud, and haughtiness is at all times hateful. ‘What hast thou that thou hast not received ? And if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ?’

“Wisdom will preserve for you what you possess, and will make your possessions seem doubly great by placing them in that light of meekness and modesty which charms every eye. Beauty is never so beautiful as when timid and retired. Love then this virtue, and it will protect you ; cling to it, and it will exalt you ; honor it, and it will embrace you, and crown your brow with every grace. ‘Wisdom is glorious, and never fadeth away, and is easily seen by them that love her, and found by them that seek her.’ Resolve to acquire it ; sigh for it ; yearn for it with every longing.

“In maidenhood be mindful of Mary, and go not forth seeking vain admiration abroad, and leaving your duties at home undone. Remember that ‘all flesh is grass,

and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field.' What will you do when the grass withers and the flower fades? Think not to despise the word of God in the proud bloom of youth, for that word remains forever, and will call to an account even the ashes of your decay. Flee, therefore, from the dangers that beset you. Give up vain hopes, false loves, and unholy desires, and wisdom will come to you, and make its abode with you, and fill your life with sweetest joys."

And when temptation comes upon you, when the vanities of the world fill your eyes, and praise and flattery are poured into your ears, remember the words of the beautiful Saint Agnes, and say: "Let my body perish rather than let my soul sin! Let me keep my thoughts pure and my love holy, so that both in body and soul I may, like my beautiful model, remain always undefiled!"



SAINT GERTRUDE.

I.



ISLEBEN is a small but well-known town of Prussian Saxony. Its chief historic fame is due to the fact that here Luther, the prince of heresiarchs, was born, and here breathed his last. In the eyes of Catholics, however, it possesses a celebrity derived from a nobler source, since it was the birth-place of a saint whose praises are spoken by the children of the Church in every land, and shall be spoken by them in every age. This was Gertrude, daughter of the Count and Countess Hackeborn. According to the best authorities she was born on the sixth of January, 1263.

At the age of five years Gertrude was consecrated to God, in the Benedictine abbey of Rodersdorf, where afterwards her sister, St. Mechtilde, when about seven years of age, became her companion.

At that time parents were permitted to dedicate their children to the special service of God at a very tender age; and the little ones thus given to the life of the cloister became real religious. As our minds are moulded by the

impressions we receive from the scenes which surround us in early life, the first associations of these children were of a character eminently adapted to fashion their hearts according to holy examples.

We can fancy to ourselves the tiny Gertrude, quaintly dressed in the long religious gown, sitting on her little hassock, and lost in child-like wonder, while some good Benedictine nun is telling her stories of our divine Saviour, or of our dear mother Mary and the noble-hearted saints. Who would not be charmed by another picture, that of the child-spouse of Jesus, kneeling at the foot of the altar with her dimpled hands folded together, and praying to him who is "the keeper of little ones?"

As time rolled by, the nuns carefully cultivated the mind of the youthful Gertrude. They knew well the powerful aid which piety supported by learning can give the Church; and, accordingly, while they were untiring in their efforts to train the nurslings of their Order in the knowledge of virtue, they were not less mindful to adorn them with the science appropriate to their holy vocation. Gertrude proved an apt and willing pupil. While still quite young, she could not only read Latin, but was even able to speak it. As she grew older, she took delight in studying the holy Scriptures and the fathers and doctors of the Church. Every year found her farther advanced in secular learning. For some time, too, she made progress in the knowledge of things divine.

But shadows were to come that should, for a time, almost shut out heaven's sunlight from her soul. Gertrude's ardor for intellectual studies became so great as to injure her spirit of devotion. She had before her the prospect of an

easy convent life, spent in the pursuits of literature ; and her heart was fascinated by its charms. Religious duties became burdensome to her ; pride and vain-glory entered her soul and chilled its fervor. In this state of tepidity she passed several years. But God was near, and, with his own gentle condescension, he sought to win her to himself once more. Prosperity had led Gertrude astray, and her divine Master now sent her sorrow and trouble and weariness of heart. The yoke of Christ became almost unbearable, and most keenly did the tepid nun feel the extent of her misery. The cross teaches us many things. For some souls it is indispensably necessary to their sanctification. Without it, they become elated, and place their happiness in creatures. But when the cross comes to these souls, it humbles them, and teaches them that true happiness in this world is found only on Calvary's height.

For more than a month Gertrude's soul was afflicted in this way ; but the day of peace came at last. Our Lord himself deigned to appear to her as she was performing an act of humility, and said,

“Thy salvation is at hand ; why art thou consumed with grief? Hast thou no counsellor, that thou art so changed by sadness ? ”

It seemed to Gertrude, as she declares, that she was in her own place in the choir, where she had been accustomed to offer up her tepid prayers, and there she heard these words,

“ I will save thee, I will deliver thee ; fear not.”

As if to confirm his promise, our divine Lord placed his right hand in hers, saying,

“You have licked the dust with my enemies, and you have sucked honey amid thorns ; but return now to me ; I will receive you, and inebriate you with my heavenly delights.”

Completely overcome by these words, she strove to go to our Lord. To her surprise, a hedge, covered with thorns, had grown up between them, and offered an impassable barrier to the accomplishment of her wish. Taking the hedge to signify her faults and imperfections, she wept. Her tears moved our dear Lord, and he graciously heard her heart's prayer. In recompense, he allowed her to gaze with mortal eyes upon the hand that had been extended to her, and she saw imprinted there the wounds he brought from Calvary.

Her conversion was begun, and favors similar to those just mentioned soon entirely weaned her from her passion for literature. Henceforth her thoughts were to be devoted exclusively to God ; nay, every act of her will, and every beating of her heart should be consecrated to his love and glory.

But she was only in her twenty-sixth year, and must she, then, renounce utterly the studies in which her mind took so much delight ?

No, she shall still be a student ; but no longer shall she study for her own sake, but for God's, that so she may come to know him more intimately, and to love him more ardently. Hereafter she shall learn how to make reproach, humiliation and pain the joy of her life ; and she shall also learn that in whatever place the Master is, there also should the servant be.

Men will call her a dreamer, an enthusiast.

What matters it? She will praise God for it, because thus they spoke of our Lord in the days of old, when in human form he dwelt on earth. Her place must be by his side, to bear with him "the burden of the day and the heats."

Such largeness of heart and devoted love could not fail to obtain a reward. Eternal Truth has declared : " If any man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him."

It was not long before her sisters in the convent began to perceive the change that had been wrought in Gertrude. All hearts were attracted to her more strongly than ever before ; yet it was hard to explain the cause of this. But those who could read with the eyes of the soul knew that her humility, her unassuming manners, and her union with God were the charms that gained alike the wayward and the wise.

Heaven was not content to be a silent witness of her sanctity. One of the nuns who was suffering from distressing temptations was admonished in a dream to ask Gertrude's help. She obeyed, and obtained immediate relief through the prayers of the holy nun. And not once only, but many times, did our Lord make known to other devout souls the sanctity of his servant.

Gertrude, it seems, was fond of this prayer :

" Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, give me to pant for thee with my whole heart, with full desire, and with thirsty soul, seeking only thy sweetness and thy delights, so that my whole mind and my whole being may

ardently sigh for thee, who art our true bliss. Most gracious Lord, write thy wounds upon my heart with thy precious blood, that in them I may read thy grief and love ; that the memory of them may ever remain in my inmost heart, to excite my compassion for thy sufferings, and to increase thy love in me. Make me despise all created things, make my heart delight in thee alone."

As she was one day repeating this prayer, she saw in spirit that the marks of the sacred wounds had been imprinted in her heart.

About this time she received the gift of prophecy. When this became known, the solitude of the convent was somewhat broken by visits from persons of all ranks, who came to consult her in regard to their doubts and troubles, and to speak with her for the good of their souls. With a feeling heart she listened to the recital of each tale of pain and sorrow ; and then distributed whatever spiritual alms God inspired her to give,

Not dealing goodly counsel from a height
That makes the lowest hate it, but a voice
Of comfort and an open hand of help.

In all this she thought not with any vain pleasure on the great gifts that had been conferred upon her ; she only felt more and more deeply that she was the servant of him who said, " Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart."

II.

GERTRUDE'S light however was too brilliant to burn unseen ; and in 1294, in the thirty first year of her age, she who had

esteemed herself the least among the sisters, was elected by them to be their abbess.

In the following year, 1295, the nuns of Rodersdorf removed to Heldelsf. Then the great work she was to do was made known to her.

Here it will not be out of place to take a glance at the state of Europe about this time.

It was an eventful period. The factions of the Guelphs and Ghibellines were disturbing the peace of the Church. Italy was sending forth her sons to perish on the field of battle. Even Rome, the city that is eternal, was more than once the theatre of sedition. France and England were engaged in a war, in which Nassau, Brabant, Savoy, Scotland, Norway and Austria participated. Germany was the scene of civil strife; brother was fighting against brother, son against father. Religion seemed threatened with ruin everywhere. Some, according to custom, predicted the downfall of the Church. But in the midst of war, sedition, and schism, God was silently arming noble champions to defend his house.

At different times during this century Saint Louis, Saint Thomas of Aquino, Saint Simon Stock, Saint Elisabeth, Saint Rose of Viterbo and Saint Clara, on the throne and in the cloister, on the battle-field and in the desert, had assisted and defended the Church. True, the noise of their arms was not heard abroad, but the work they did was all the more effectual.

Towards the close of this century our Lord Jesus came to Saint Gertrude, and asked her to aid him to uphold his Church.

What could a feeble nun do against the numbers that were opposing the interests of God ?

We might wonder, did we not know that he who is all-wise chooses "the weak things of the world that he may confound the strong."

Then, in what way should she help in upholding the Church ?

Her life's history gives the solution of the problem. Her part was accomplished by prayer, by love for God, by suffering for God's dear sake. Where the Master is, there should the disciple be. Gertrude's soul was now totally absorbed in watching over the interests of our Saviour. His complaint seemed so mournful: "So few are willing to help me!" and her ardent, affectionate heart was moved to its inmost depths.

Under Gertrude's direction, the convent of Heldelfs became a little heaven on earth. Its very walls seemed to bear the impress of rest divine, and to whisper to the restless world, that they who dwelt there possessed that peace "which surpasseth all understanding." Within, the hush of prayer hung over all; even the little innocents who had been dedicated to the service of God seldom infringed the silence. Several times during the day the nuns were summoned to chant the praises of their divine Master. As soon as the signal was given for prayer, each one silently left the work she was engaged in, and repaired to the chapel. There, the low-bowed head, the down-cast eyes, and the peaceful countenance spoke of converse with a holier world than ours.

One could see the lady of rank count it all joy to perform

the humblest tasks in the kitchen and the laundry. When conversation was permitted, they might be seen in groups in the convent garden, either sitting under the shade of the trees, or traversing the walks. At such a time they illustrated in their bearing the charity, humility, and self-denial of the Gospel.

In one company, a touching story of some saint would be the ruling topic; in another, the interests of the Church; in a third, they would speak of the holy influences of a convent-home, and encourage one another to aim at what was highest and noblest; while a fourth group would gather around their beloved abbess, and listen eagerly to her words of cheer. Doubtless they loved to hear from her lips the story of the Sacred Heart, for Gertrude had seen it in a vision; and the apostle Saint John had at another time told her that in later ages the world would be aroused from its lethargy, at hearing how that Heart Divine is inflamed with love for men. This was their sweetest subject for conversation, sweeter than honey to the taste, more fragrant than roses by the waters.

Dear Saint Gertrude! She was so full of the love of God that few hearts were unmoved when she spoke. Every day men were dying by thousands, sadly unprepared. Their salvation could be obtained by prayers: "And we," she said, "must save them."

But then had not the nuns their own souls to save?

Had they not their own self-love to conquer?

Was it not enough for them to die daily by the sacrifice of their own wills?

Yes, all this they had to do; but this would not satisfy

Gertrude, they must do more. And she reminded them that after all, they, at least, were not called upon, like the early martyrs, to die for God, but to live for him, and draw others to his side by holy deeds.

Nor was Gertrude unmindful of the little ones in the convent ; and so great was the affection they had for her in return, that they would have considered it wrong, as one of her biographers tells us, to say that they loved father or mother or any one in the world more than Gertrude.

However, lest the excitement of a life spent in action should withdraw her too far from contemplation at the feet of our Blessed Saviour, she was warned not to exceed the proper limits, even in holy zeal. Obedient to this injunction Gertrude strove to become more intimately united to God. She sighed for the time when she should be able to see him face to face. Once, indeed, she had been vouchsafed a glimpse of that sacred face ; but the vision was transitory, and caused her to pine more and more for the unending day of Eternity when she could gaze upon that light for ever.

So ardent was this longing of hers that once when she was thrown down a precipitous mountain-path, while making a journey from one convent to another, she merely said,

“How happy, sweetest Lord, I should have been, if this fall had brought me sooner to thee.”

“What,” exclaimed one of her companions, “are you not afraid to die without the sacraments?”

“I desire most earnestly,” she replied, “to die fortified by the sacraments, but to me the will of God is preferable even to all sacraments. To bow in perfect submission to

God's providence is, in my opinion, the best preparation for death. I trust, in whatever way I may die, that I shall enjoy the mercy of my God. Without God's mercy my loss will be eternal, whether I die prepared for death or not."

While she was at prayer it frequently pleased Divine Providence to lay open the unseen world to her eyes. Many were the revelations with which she was then favored, revelations which Germany listened to with admiration and awe. These she was instructed by our Lord himself to commit to writing.

Gertrude did not forget her duties as abbess, while enjoying the consolations of prayer. She had learned this one great lesson from our Divine Lord, to do the work given her to do, and to do it well. As superior she is said to have excelled in the virtues requisite to lead and govern. She was a sweet consoler to the sad of heart ; and to the gay a cheerful friend. She spared no effort to supply her children with all that was necessary to their comfort ; while, at the same time, she was most strict in curtailing all superfluities.

She tended the sick religious with all the care and devotedness of a mother. With her own hands she would serve them, and supply their wants ; smoothing the pillow and refreshing with cooling draughts the parched lips of the fever-worn : watching with them through the night, and standing by their side during the day. Kind words, too, which are better than all these things, she gave from the abundance and sincerity of her heart.

Thus did the servant of God pass her days. So perfectly was she detached from all earthly things, that even when she could have chosen what was most suited to her liking

in regard to her apparel and the necessities of life, she would close her eyes, and take whatever her hand happened to touch, esteeming it as a gift from God.

Tribulations proved Gertrude's worthiness to sit at the table of the King of kings. The death of her sister, Saint Mechtilde, was a heavy blow to her. For together, hand in hand, they had climbed the heights of Christian perfection. Sadness stole upon Gertrude's heart when her beloved sister was taken from her side. Not that she repined at all against God's providence ; but even the saints have hearts to feel.

Through St. Mechtilde we become acquainted with the high sanctity of her sister. It happened one day that Saint Mechtilde, while chanting the divine office, saw our Lord seated upon a princely throne, around which Gertrude was walking, who, although she appeared to be engaged in fulfilling her exterior duties, never for a moment turned her eyes away from the face of our Divine Lord. Astonished at this vision Saint Mechtilde began to consider what its meaning could be. Then our Lord said,

"This is an image of my beloved Gertrude's life. Thus she is always walking in my presence, trying to discover what my heart best loves, and immediately when she has found this out, performing it with care and fidelity. Her whole life becomes in this way, one continuous chain of praise, consecrated to my honor and glory."

Still, St. Mechtilde had a difficulty which she could not answer in a manner satisfactory to herself.

"If my sister, Lord, leads so perfect a life," she said, "how is it that the defects of others seem so grievous to her?"

“She cannot bear,” graciously replied our Lord, “that the least stain should sully her own heart; and, therefore, the faults of her neighbor cause her much grief.”

At another time, when Saint Mechtilde was praying for Gertrude, she beheld, in a vision, the union which existed between God and her sister.

She ventured to ask, however, why Gertrude seemed to take equal delight in all that she did, whether it was prayer, or reading, or writing books, or giving instructions.

“Her heart,” answered our Saviour, “is so closely united to mine, that she wishes and performs whatever my spirit suggests to her.”

III.

FORTY years had passed since Gertrude's election as abbess. More than one hundred ladies had made their profession as nuns under her administration. From her lips they had received the sacred precepts of the spiritual life. From her, too, they had learnt to place the highest value on that liberty of heart which was a pre-eminent characteristic of Gertrude's life. God himself declared that this trait in his servant was the one which pleased him most. With this virtue a soul can soar to the height of perfection, since it makes us ready at every moment for whatever favors God may be pleased to send, and restrains our souls from binding themselves to anything which could be displeasing to God, or could offer any hindrance to his holy spirit.

The most trivial action she rendered of the greatest value by the noble intention with which she performed it.

Gertrude was once quite weak, and in great suffering. She needed refreshment, and some grapes were near at hand. Should she, or should she not take them? Ordinarily she would have refused, but feeling the necessity of alleviating her pain, she said to herself,

“Not for my own pleasure, but for thy dear sake, most loving Lord, I eat these grapes, that so I may refresh thee in my soul.”

This so pleased our Lord that he revealed to her that she had made amends to him for the bitter draught he had tasted on the cross; and he added,

“The greater your purity of intention is in recreating your senses, the sweeter is the delight I find in your soul.”

After throwing away the skins and seeds of the grapes, Gertrude beheld the demon attempting to collect them so as to upbraid her for what she had done. Scarcely had he put forth a hand to pick up one of the skins, when he was so burned by it that he made off in terror, uttering dismal cries.

Soon after the fortieth anniversary of her election as superior, Gertrude was stricken with apoplexy. Her children were filled with dismay at the thought of losing so good a mother. Fervently they besought God to spare their much-loved abbess. For a few months longer Gertrude remained with them; but it was on a bed of pain. The only words she could utter were, “*Spiritus meus*,” “My Beloved.”

Yet even while dying she was not forgetful of those who had been intrusted to her care. One of the nuns was ill and unable to leave her bed. The devoted abbess, anxious to visit and console her child, implored by signs, too

earnest to be misunderstood, to be taken to the sufferer. The nuns, complying with her wish, carried their superior to the sister's bedside. Gertrude could articulate nothing but her accustomed ejaculation, "My Beloved;" nevertheless her looks and signs were so expressive of her tender love, that they who stood by were moved to tears.

This is the last act recorded of Gertrude. It was not long before the welcome cry broke upon her ears :

"Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him."

The bell summoned the nuns to the bedside of their dying abbess. They gathered around her on their knees, and the hush of the death-chamber was broken by their sobs. Gertrude gazed upon them with her own maternal eyes, and attempted to bless them. The tears were coursing down her cheeks. Suddenly her face became radiant. Jesus, her Lord and her God, had come to her, and promised to give her a welcome similar to that bestowed on Mary, his mother, when she was leaving the world. He was accompanied by the Queen of the Angels, and the chosen Saint John. With them was a band of virgins, who came and stood among the weeping nuns.

The day passed, and as night wore on, the joyous peal rang forth from heaven : "Come, O Lady, come, the joys of heaven await thee." Gertrude heard the call "to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels, and to the church of the first-born, who are written in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect." No further summons was needed, and her saintly soul passed to the vision of God.

One by one the nuns pressed their lips to the hands that had so often assisted them, silently they gazed upon the face that had cheered them in their trials and struggles, and then they tenderly adorned her holy relics in as fair a manner as their poverty would permit. At the appointed time they laid the body in its resting-place.

Scarcely had this been done, when the walls of the convent became all ablaze with light, and Gertrude appeared, accompanied by a band of most beautiful virgins.

The reward had come. Years of patient suffering, of mortification, and of prayer were now recompensed by eternal bliss. Now she can feast her eyes on the unfading vision of God's divine Son, and sing before him the never-ending song, which those only can sing whose foreheads are marked with the virgin's seal.

Although Saint Gertrude was never canonized according to the usual forms of the Church, the veneration paid to her has received full sanction from the Holy See. It received its first approval in 1606, about three centuries after the saint's death ; and in 1678, during the pontificate of Innocent XI., her name was inserted in the martyrology. The eulogy, "who was remarkable for the gift of revelation," was afterwards added.

Nearly six hundred years have passed since the days of Saint Gertrude. But she still lives in the memory, the never-dying memory, of Catholic love. Her works are to be found in almost every land. And holy men who have meditated upon her revelations, and considered her pure and heavenly life, have exclaimed, "Truly this is the Lord's doing : and it is wonderful in our eyes."

SAINT ROSE OF LIMA.

I.



LIMA, the capital of Peru, and one of the chief cities on the Southern American continent, lies in a delightful country near the Pacific coast. The waters of the Rimac flow by the city, and while contributing to the fertility of the land, add much to the beauty of the situation. The great range of the Andes approaches to within twenty leagues of the city, and its spurs form a kind of amphitheatre, within which Lima is built.

In the year 1586, hardly half a century after its foundation, this city was privileged to witness the birth of a child, whose name was afterwards to be placed high in the number of God's elect. Although Saint Rose was of Spanish parentage, yet she was born, was reared, and died in the land of America, and for this reason we claim her for our cherished own, the first favored one of our country on whom Holy Church has bestowed the honor of canonization.

The 20th of April was the happy day on which God gave this precious flower to earth. It was not to tarry long, but

in its brief career, a great time was to be fulfilled. The Saint's father and mother were Gaspar Florez and Mary Oliva, both of whom were of noble descent, but of scanty fortunes. When the infant was christened, she received the name of Isabel, out of compliment to her godmother, the lady Isabel of Herrera, who was also her aunt. But after a few months, her mother perceiving the impression of a rose upon her face, renamed her from that flower, and the Archbishop of Lima afterwards approved of this change, by conferring confirmation on the child under the name of Rose.

Little Rose was afterwards much troubled about her right to the name, suspecting that it was given her through a desire on the part of her mother to render her beauty more attractive. The child feared vanity more than she feared death. So to set her mind at rest, and to be certain of doing God's will, she determined to lay her doubts before the Blessed Virgin, and to abide by her decision, which in all confidence she believed would be made manifest to her. Kneeling down one day before the Blessed Virgin's statue, she implored our Lady to remove this darkness from her mind.

"My dearest mother," she sighed, "you know how much I love you, and that I would rather die than do anything displeasing to you. Help me, then, in this trouble, and tell me whether I ought to keep the new name which my mother has given me."

Our Lady could not resist this appeal, for she dearly loved the little one. She consoled her loving child, and with pleasure beaming from her eyes,

"Do not be uneasy, my child," she said, "this name of

Rose is very pleasing to my Divine Son and to me. Not only shall you keep the name, but you shall have mine also, and in future you shall be called Rose of Saint Mary."

This answer dispelled the child's doubts; she was glad, moreover, to find how tenderly her dear mother Mary loved her; and though from her earliest days her little heart was devoted to the Blessed Virgin, yet now she became bound to her still more closely. In this visit she also learned a lesson which she remembered all her life, that in the holy mother of God we can always have an unfailing protector. So in our Blessed Lady she placed the fullest confidence, and when any doubt arose in her mind as to the course of conduct she should pursue, the Blessed Virgin was sure to receive a visit from her confiding little friend.

II.

EVEN in her cradle the child appeared to enjoy the use of reason. She required but little attention from her mother, had no humors to be gratified, and was pleased with everything she received; and although visitations of acute suffering came not seldom, yet she was never heard to cry or complain.

From her earliest years she seems to have known that she must carry on a relentless warfare against her senses; and, as a result of this knowledge, at no time and in no place did she spare herself the cruelest ill-treatment. The sufferings she endured would challenge the courage of the bravest and strongest, and her fortitude and constancy were worthy of the most glorious martyrs.

We have an instance of her patient courage when she was but three months old. One day the lid of a chest fell and caught her thumb : not a cry, not a complaint escaped from the child ; the accident was not even known for some time. The thumb through neglect became very sore, and grew worse every day, until at last her mother discovered what a severe injury the child had received. A surgeon was immediately called in, who, on examining the hurt, found it necessary to extract the nail by the root. In the operation he had to use a pair of pincers, which, from the way they were applied, must have caused great pain. But the brave child never winced or made the slightest movement, although everyone who stood by, was suffering out of sympathy with the little patient.

This example of her endurance was but the prelude to another instance still more wonderful. When our little Rose was four years old, she was troubled with a disorder of the scalp. Her mother dressed the affected part with a powder so corrosive as to burn off the skin and form painful ulcers. The assistance of the surgeon again became necessary. Every day for six successive weeks a portion of the corrupted matter was cut off ; and though the pain must have been excruciating on account of the excitement of her nerves, yet the child endured it without a cry.

These are not the only instances which could be given of her spirit of mortification, but the nature of this little sketch forbids more detail. Suffice it to say, that as she increased in years, and her suffering became more frequent and severe, her patience also became strengthened.

God showed great kindness to little Rose in sending her

these early trials. By their means he weaned her from herself and kept her for his own.

When she was five years old an incident occurred which seemed meant to draw her to a closer union with God. One day, as she was engaged in playing with her little brother, he accidentally threw some dirt on her hair. Fond of neatness as she was, she could scarcely help showing some slight vexation. Her brother, with a gravity far beyond his years, gently reproved her :

“ Dear sister,” he said, “ why are you so easily offended ? Remember that women’s ringlets are so many cords which bind the hearts of men, and drag them into unending darkness.”

This reproof, falling on the child’s ear like an oracle from God, filled her with sorrow for her fault, and made her ponder deeply over her brother’s words.

At this same time God inspired her with a knowledge of the world’s vanity, and infused into her heart the desire of consecrating herself entirely to him. She conceived a distaste for everything savoring of a worldly spirit. She began a new life ; and from this time forth she seemed to live in the midst of the angels. Now, too, she was interiorly instructed to take Saint Katharine of Siena for her mistress in the school of perfection ; and during the rest of her life she bore such a resemblance to this great saint, that it would be difficult to distinguish their characters one from the other.

To render herself more pleasing in the sight of the Most High, she resolved to give him her whole heart and soul ; and for this purpose, at the age of five, she united herself by vow to that glorious company of virgins, who, as Saint

John says, are purchased from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb. After her vow, her hatred of worldly show increased. To render herself unprepossessing, she cut off her hair ; and many were the other devices she employed to prevent the admiration excited by her beauty and charming manners.

III.

“HONOR thy father and thy mother” is a precept which Rose of Saint Mary fulfilled to the letter and in the spirit. True, at first sight it looks as if it were impossible for her to pay perfect obedience to parents who were filled with worldly ideas, and who sometimes followed out these ideas to the prejudice of their spiritual welfare. But our dear Rose always found a means of reconciling the submission due to God with the submission due to father and mother. If sometimes they gave a command contrary to the spirit of perfection, she would either by an humble remonstrance bring them to a change of mind, or else she would season her obedience in such a way that her inferior nature, instead of being gratified, would, on the contrary, be sorely tried. But in all indifferent matters she was blindly submissive. She did not need a second bidding whenever she was told to do anything which was not inconsistent with perfection.

Rose's mother, to test her daughter's fidelity, one day bade her embroider some flowers on a piece of linen. According to the instructions, she would have to work the flowers the wrong way. Although Rose saw that her time and labor would be wasted, she did exactly as she was told ;

and when her mother pretended to be angry at her blind obedience, the child answered that she knew the work would be all wrong, but that she felt bound to follow the instructions she had received. Frequently her mother, not considering how strictly Rose obeyed her injunctions, in an angry mood would forbid her to drink, and sometimes six days would pass by without a drop of liquid moistening the child's lips. To gain the merit of holy obedience, she never began anything without having leave either from her father or from her mother. Their voice was for her the voice of God.

But at times the child's conscience revolted against carrying out her parents' wishes. For instance : Madame Florez was proud of her daughter's rare beauty, and she wished Rose to make use of certain cosmetics to preserve it. The young girl represented to her mother how foolish such a thing would be, and how it could not be pleasing to God. Madame Florez had to yield to arguments dictated by wisdom from above, still, not long after this, she bade Rose to put on a garland of flowers, such as were commonly worn by young girls at that time. The little maiden could not well demur and she put on the wreath. But the spirit of vanity was far from having any room for rejoicing ; for among the flowers she inserted a large needle pointing inward, and then putting on the crown, she pressed the needle into her head with such force that the physician, who had to be called in, experienced great difficulty in removing it.

On another occasion, she consented to put on a pair of perfumed gloves. Immediately her hands became numb with cold, and then grew so hot, that with all her love of

suffering, she was compelled to take off the gloves to get some relief. That night, in a vision, God showed her the gloves enveloped in flames, thus reproving the vanity she had yielded to, under the pretext of being obedient to her mother. This reproof determined her never to obey in anything which was agreeable to the spirit of the world, without adding some mortification ; and her purpose ever after remained unshaken.

Rose had such an aversion to appearing in society, that she was often occasioned great anxiety by her mother's insisting on having her company, when paying visits of courtesy. Sometimes Rose was obliged to go ; at other times, by dint of hard pressing, she succeeded in obtaining a release ; but often, again, she would inflict such wounds on herself that her leaving the house became impossible.

One stratagem which she used, resulted so seriously as to endanger her eyesight. She rubbed her eyelids with burning Indian pepper, which greatly inflamed them and caused intense pain. But the saintly girl did not care for pain, if only she were permitted to live in retirement. Her mother severely reprimanded her for using this cruel artifice, and she tried to show Rose how unbecoming was such behavior, seeing that eventually it must lead to the saddest consequences. The Saint reminded her mother that it was far better to have no eyes at all, than that they should be employed in gazing on the follies of the world. Once again the mother's arguments were found wanting, and all she could do was to permit her child to follow the inspirations of heaven.

The parents of our Saint were descended from the nobility

of Spain; but, though at one time wealthy, they had suffered a reverse of fortune, so that not unfrequently they experienced the bitterness of poverty. Besides, the burden of their household was not an ordinary one, on account of the numerous family for whose support they had to provide. By attention and care Rose had become expert in embroidery and other kinds of needle work; and day and night she would strenuously ply her needle to contribute to the resources of her parents. The people of the city were delighted with her work, and eagerly purchased all she was able to do. The income from her needle, added to the proceeds from the flowers she raised in her garden, made by no means an insignificant sum; but, even with her unflagging industry, she could not at all times meet the necessities of the household. Often on such occasions, as she acknowledged one day with her own native simplicity, God came to her aid, and in some way, made up what was needed.

Her father and mother, at a time when they were both suffering from severe illness, found Rose to be an angel of charity. She was extremely exact in the preparation of their medicines and in carrying out the physician's prescriptions. The sick room was filled with every comfort she could procure, while her conversation, coming as it did from a heart filled with the love of God, fell on their ears like heavenly music and inspired them with patience in their sufferings.

IV.

OBEDIENCE must be shown not only to father and mother, but also to all who have the slightest authority over us.

These are entitled to all respect, as being the representatives of God. This truth Saint Rose had always at heart. During the last three years of her life, which she passed in the house of her dear friend, Don Gonzalez de la Massa, she was obedient to his children and servants ; she did nothing without his express permission, and often on her knees, she would beg a little water from him. But her obedience to her spiritual directors showed her sanctity in a more special way, for submission in matters relating to the soul's guidance is very difficult, inasmuch as the devil is ever on the alert to impress the soul with the idea that all it has to do is to follow the interior spirit that leads it. Saint Rose knew that there is a good and a bad spirit working within the soul, and that of herself, she was not able to distinguish them. For this reason she showed her confessor unquestioning obedience in everything he commanded. Did he tell her to relinquish her rigid penances, or to receive holy communion less frequently, Saint Rose never in the least departed from his instructions ; and God blessed her obedience.

Our Saint, who in all things sought to be directly opposed to the spirit of vanity, earnestly strove to render her person unprepossessing in the eyes of the world ; and though the struggle, she found, was an obstinate one, yet perseverance at last crowned her endeavors with success. Nature had bestowed its choicest favors on her ; and her extraordinary beauty, refinement of mind, engaging conversation and manners, and especially her angelic modesty, were magnets which drew every one's admiration. But Rose felt the danger of the world's flattery, and she resolved to keep her course free from a rock, upon which many a soul has been shipwrecked.

By incessant prayer, fasting and work she succeeded in making her face pale and livid ; and to destroy the beauty of her hands, she washed them, on occasions, in hot lime. She refrained from going to any place where she would be likely to meet company. While living at a little village not far from Lima, she remained four years without once leaving the house.

But with all her precautions, she could not escape several offers of marriage. A lady of noble birth and great fortune, delighted with her character and virtue, eagerly sought to bring about a union between Rose and her son, and she held out to the young girl's parents fair prospects for themselves. Indeed, every one was pleased with the proposed marriage except Rose. In early childhood she had chosen Christ for her spouse, and she would be faithful to him forever. To her father and mother she declared with a modest firmness, that she could accept no other spouse but Christ our Lord. Threats as well as caresses were employed to lead her to a change of mind, but no inducement could prevail over the resolute maiden. Her thoughtless parents persecuted her cruelly, but they could never shake her constancy ; and our saintly Rose triumphed over all the efforts of the spirit of darkness to break through the ramparts which guarded her sacred vow.

V.

BUT this persecution opened her eyes to the danger she was exposed to by remaining in the world ; and to be secure for the future, she thought of entering a convent, where she could lead a life of penance and seclusion.

When it was known that she had the intention of becoming a nun, many convents offered to receive her, and the Archbishop was anxious to have her open a new monastery which his niece had just built. But Rose in imitation of Saint Katharine of Siena, her mistress in the spiritual life, chose to enroll herself in the third order of Saint Dominic, for thus she could still live with her parents and help them in their necessities.

Our Lord afterwards showed by a miracle that he approved of her choice. One day as the Saint was walking in her little garden, a pretty butterfly, marked with black and white, the colors of the dress worn by Saint Dominic's children, came and fluttered around her, as if to offer her its caresses and join her company. Inspired from above, the saintly girl took this as a sign that she had chosen according to the will of her Beloved, and, with acts of thanksgiving ever ascending from her heart to his throne, she prepared to receive the habit of Saint Dominic. So, on the feast of Saint Lawrence, August 10, 1606, she was admitted among the sisters by Father Alphonso Velasquez, her confessor.

Her joy was unbounded when she saw what a secure haven she had reached, and she praised and blessed our Lord with all the energy of her being. But soon a cloud came to obscure, for a while, the serenity of her happiness. Rose was fully conscious of the high privilege she enjoyed in being a daughter of Saint Dominic, and the thought of her unworthiness weighed so heavily upon her that she was almost induced to relinquish the habit.

"This habit, by its pure whiteness," said she, "calls for an innocence which my poor soul cannot offer."

Besides, the benefactor and friend whom she held most dear wished her to become a Carmelite, towards whose austere life she seemed to be more inclined. Then, too, her real object in taking the habit of Saint Dominic, had been to escape from the world's influence ; but she found that now she was much more sought after, and esteemed by the people than ever before. These reasons she considered sufficiently persuasive to make her relinquish the dress worn by the Ladies of Saint Dominic.

But before coming to a final decision, she laid her distress before the Blessed Virgin. She did not remain unheeded, for, in an ecstasy, she was instructed to persevere to the end in her present life. After this, no trouble about her vocation ever harassed the Saint, and according to our Lord's bidding, she lived and died among the Sisters of Penance.

VI.

MANY persons find it quite agreeable to try to become saints as long as they can proceed according to their own wishes, exempt from suffering and trials, and living in the midst of enjoyment. But when the hand of God is heavy upon them, their ardor becomes cooled. Now when the foundation of humility has once been laid, the first stone in the edifice of perfection is mortification, and no advance is possible, until restraint has been put upon the passions. To make herself all the more surefooted along the paths of holiness, Rose assailed herself with every kind of torture; and the hatred she showed her inferior nature never permitted her to mitigate her sufferings.

From her youngest days, the saintly child had accustomed herself to refrain from eating of the luscious fruits in which Lima abounds ; and at the age of six years she began to fast on bread and water three days in the week. On reaching her fifteenth year she made a vow never to eat meat, unless when compelled by strict obedience. Even in time of sickness, when strengthening food was almost a necessity, to eat meat would make her relapse into a more dangerous state, so that our Lord showed that he wished to assist her in keeping her vow.

To gratify her love of abstinence, she used to take her meals apart from the rest of the family, as delicacies were too much for her palate. But one day her mother told her to give up this singularity, and sit at the table with the rest. Here Saint Rose was forced to yield, but afterwards she arranged with the servant that nothing should be offered her except a very unpalatable dish, consisting of a crust of hard bread and a handful of bitter herbs, unseasoned with salt.

The better to serve her purpose, she gathered wild herbs in the woodland, and brought them home to cultivate in her little garden. Her abstinence was so rigorous that she is known to have taken nothing but a loaf of bread of moderate size, and a pitcher of water, for fifty days. At another time she lived seven weeks without tasting a drop of liquid. It was a common occurrence for her to remain in her oratory from Thursday to Saturday, so absorbed in union with God, that the wants of the body could not make themselves sensible. On one occasion, for eight days, she ate no food except the bread of heavenly life. In the

midst of these deprivations her thirst became very violent, and though, on this account, she was forced to drink, yet she never consented to take anything but warm water.

Saint Rose's abstinence was but the pleasant part of her mortification. By her rigid fasts, she seemed to have lost all strength ; and yet, when we recall the flagellations and other tortures she inflicted on herself, we must confess that as her sufferings increased, her power of endurance also increased. Indeed, she became so inhuman towards herself that her confessor had to place some restraint upon her. For a long time she had daily given herself a severe scourging, but after she became a Sister of Saint Dominic her instrument of penance could not inflict pain enough to satisfy her fervor; so she formed a new scourge of two iron chains, and with this she made the blood flow freely from her person.

One day the people of the town were in the wildest excitement from having by some misconception understood a celebrated preacher to say, that soon an earthquake would happen which would engulf the entire city. Saint Rose, to implore God's pity on the terrified inhabitants, scourged herself so cruelly that she nearly died in consequence.

This form of penance she practised every night, so that the wounds she made had no time to heal. Besides, she took special care not to strike herself always in the same place, so that her whole body must have been one sore.

But more cruel still was another contrivance she adopted to remind her of our Saviour's passion. She wound an iron chain in three turns around her body, and having locked the ends by means of a padlock, she threw away

the key. Very soon the sharp points of the chain entered the flesh, and the pain became so intense that one night she fell to the ground in a swoon. The servant, awakened by the cry which the holy sufferer gave forth, ran to her help ; and having discovered the cause of the accident, endeavored to take off the chain ; but not having the key, she hurried to the garden for a stone to break the fastening. While she was gone, the saint, fearing her mother would come and find her in this plight, earnestly besought heaven to deliver her from such a discovery. No sooner was the prayer breathed, than the chain was parted by an invisible hand. However, she did not lay aside this dear instrument of torture, but as soon as the wounds had healed, she again put it on, and wore it until her confessor ordered her to remove it.

VII.

WITH all these acute sufferings, Saint Rose thought she did not yet bear a sufficiently close resemblance to her crucified Redeemer, for she felt that the crown which had wreathed his brow was wanting to hers. So she determined to resemble him even in this particular. For this purpose, she first made a pewter crown, and studded it, on the inside, with sharp iron nails. This she pressed down on her head ; and, scarcely heeding the pain, she wore it for several years.

But in the course of time, thinking the torture from this instrument to be quite insignificant, she made another crown of silver plate, in which she fixed three rows of sharp points, in all, ninety-nine ; so that when she set this second

circlet on her head, ninety-nine punctures were made. As her hair had again become long, she was afraid it would be an obstacle to the full action of her new torture, so she cut it off, leaving only a little over her forehead to hide her penance.

Over this crown she drew her veil, any disturbance of which would make the points sink in deeper ; and every time her frame became agitated from coughing, or from any other cause, her head would suffer severely. The points in the crown were of unequal lengths ; and as they did not all enter the flesh at the same time, they gave an additional pain, on becoming inserted. Since she changed the position of this thorny diadem every day, so it happened that every day either fresh wounds were made, or those which had almost healed were again opened. Rose's mother was for a long time ignorant of the severe penance which her daughter was inflicting on herself, and by the merest accident she came to the knowledge of it. Still she dared not take the crown away from her, for fear the saintly girl would invent something yet more cruel ; however, she made loud complaints to Rose's confessor. But he was so overcome by his penitent's pleading, that he was constrained to let her continue to wear the crown. At the burial of Saint Rose, as there were no flowers to adorn her coffin, the wreath of thorns which crowned the statue of Saint Katharine of Siena, was taken off and placed on the sacred remains. A more glorious testimony of their veneration, the people of Lima could not have manifested towards their dear Saint.

Saint Rose's mortification extended to all hours and oc-

casions ; she wished to be always suffering, and well she succeeded in carrying out her heart's desire, for her whole life, even in moments of sleep, was only a slow martyrdom. Shortly before her death, she used sometimes to spend the night in a corner of her room where she was so exposed to the cold that she would become almost frozen before morning. She never permitted herself to sit down at work, except when compelled by sheer inability to stand, and then she would make use of a very narrow piece of wood for a seat. She constantly wore a coarse hair tunic, which kept her in continual suffering.

Even sleep was allowed no claim on her, outside of the two hours which she gave herself for rest ; and this time, short as it was, she did not always pass in sleep. Every day twelve hours were devoted to prayer, and the remaining time she employed in working for her parents, and in performing acts of charity. At night, too, she had her devices to cause suffering. She filled her bed with fragments of tiles and pieces of hard twisted wood, and, as a rest for her head, for a long time she used only a large stone, until at length her mother bade her use a pillow. She made a pillow, but packed it hard and tight with wool, taking care to put in a quantity of vine branches and broken rushes.

But in spite of these austerities, and the habit of being ever on the watch, which she acquired in consequence, the devil would often assail her, especially with drowsiness ; yet she always knew how to cope with him. During his visitations, she would strike her head against the wall, and give herself hard blows ; sometimes even she would fix her arms to a large cross which she had in her room, so that her body

hung suspended in the air ; and thus she would triumph over the temptation.

VIII.

SOLITUDE ever held a charm over the mind and heart of Saint Rose. She knew that it is in the recollection of an interior life that God converses with his friends and lavishes his caresses on them. So it is no wonder that we see her fleeing from the world's gay company, and living unconscious of the splendor of its show. This love of retirement she cultivated in her childhood days. In her father's garden she had built a little hut of palm leaves, so closely intertwined as to intercept the sun's rays. If any one called for her, the child's mother would answer :

"If you want to find Rose, you must look for her in the garden ; for that place she makes her bedroom, dining room and oratory."

Whenever the Saint was obliged to accompany her mother in visits to acquaintances, her modesty would be shocked at hearing persons speak of her sanctity and familiarity with God. But after a time, to escape this annoyance, she determined to withdraw into the strictest seclusion. However, the proposed step met with many obstacles, especially from her mother. Then Rose had recourse to prayer ; and going one day to our Lady's chapel, she made a votive offering to her of a rosary of coral beads. The offering was hung around the neck of the Blessed Virgin's statue. But a few days afterwards, to everyone's astonishment, the same beads had been transferred from our Lady's neck to the hands of her divine Son. The father sacristan of the chapel declared

that no human being had made this change, and that it must have been a miracle from heaven. This was a token for our saint that her design was pleasing to God, and her joy was still greater, when she found that her parents no longer opposed her wishes.

She immediately built a little hermitage, of the smallest dimensions, at a short distance from the house ; and to this place no one was allowed to come, except her confessor, to whom she regularly gave an account of her conscience. Afterwards, however, a few others were allowed to have conversations with her. Once it was remarked to her that the cell was too narrow. "Oh, no," the holy recluse answered, "it is large enough for Jesus and me." Her time in this seclusion was passed in prayer, work and penitential exercises.

The last three years of her life were spent in the house of her benefactor, Don Gonzalez de la Massa, who, for a long time, had been desirous that she should enter his family ; and in this new home, she made another little cell, on the plan which she had used for her first hermitage, so that up to the time of her death, her solitude was free from interruption.

IX.

No higher encomium could be pronounced upon the undaunted patience which she exhibited under suffering, than the simple relation of the facts we have here set down. These sufferings were, it is true, self-inflicted ; but her patience appeared unalterable, no matter from what source trials came. Her mother was in continual opposition to her ; Madame Florez blamed her daughter's manner of

life ; censured her rigid fasts and penances ; chided her for living so much at variance with the world's principles ; and found fault with her for destroying her beauty. The people of the city, too, often misunderstood her behavior, and not seldom they treated her as if she were a deluded soul, a hypocrite, a child of the demon. On such occasions, the Saint never uttered a word of remonstrance, but silently gloried in these opportunities of becoming more and more like her persecuted Redeemer.

To complete her sufferings, disease was seldom absent from that poor frame, bruised as it was from cruel scourgings. Sickness came upon her in every form. She was, at different periods, afflicted with asthma, sciatica, pleurisy, quinsy ; for three years she was a paralytic, unable to leave her bed ; and frequently she fell into convulsions, caused by a disorder of the membrane surrounding the heart ; fever seldom left her, and gout in her hands and feet caused her intense pain. Still, with all these trials, the holy penitent longed for yet more.

Saint Rose seemed to be even unconscious of her own sufferings, although she was full of concern for the sufferings and wants of others. To the poor she was a noble-hearted friend. When circumstances permitted, she went from house to house, soliciting aid for their relief ; and being well-known, by reason of her sanctity, she received alms in abundance. Sometimes she would deprive herself of the necessaries of life, so as to be able to contribute to the support of the poor. One day she gave a new cloak, belonging to her mother, to a poor woman, to cover her half-naked children. Rose's mother was much displeased, but

the Saint assured her that they would be far from suffering by this slight act of charity, and true enough, a few days after, they received, as a present, much more than the value of the cloak.

At another time, she brought to her mother's house a destitute girl who was afflicted with an offensive cancer in the breast. The Saint dressed her sore, procured every comfort for her, and, by redoubled exertions, managed to defray all the expenses thus incurred, until the girl had perfectly recovered. When she could meet no occasions for the exercise of her charity in the streets of the city, she would sometimes visit the hospitals, where no disease was too loathsome for her care, and no attention too exhausting for her zeal.

Saint Rose was God's own child from her very birth ; and the love of her heart ever yearned for God with such a longing that her Beloved's eyes beamed more and more brightly upon her soul. Her union with God never knew any interruption. At her work, in conversation, her thoughts were ever upon his divine perfections. Even during sleep, her imagination did not wander from God.

Her great desire was to be foremost in giving to heaven the tribute of earth's praise. Once she entered into a contest with a little bird, to decide which of them excelled in offering songs of thanksgiving to God. During the whole Lenten season of the year in which our Saint died, this little bird would come every evening punctually at sunset, and, perching on Rose's window-ledge, would pipe, at her bidding, its most delightful carols in honor of its Creator. Then Saint Rose, not willing to be outdone by this tiny creature,

would begin to sing God's praises, in a voice made sweet and full by reason of the enthusiasm which her soul's fervor lent her ; and when she had finished her strain, the little bird would begin again. And thus, for quite a long time, in happy rivalry, they would mingle their voices with the songs that ring through the home of peace, to the glory of the Most High.

X.

OUR sweet Rose had read that Saint Katharine of Siena had been espoused by the Lord Christ ; and now she ardently longed that the like favor might be hers. Still, in her humility, she would have thought it a crime to present such a petition to heaven ; but our dear Lord, knowing the innocence of her heart graciously acceded to her desire. Soon he came to her, and, in the presence of the Blessed Virgin, solemnly espoused her with these words :

“Rose of my heart, I take thee for my spouse.”

That she might have some sensible token of the dignity to which she had been exalted, she procured a ring, and on Maunday Thursday the father sacristan of the church which she attended, placed it in the tabernacle at her request. On Easter morning, while the Saint was praying in the church, the ring sprang from the tabernacle and adjusted itself upon her finger.

Saint Rose carried on a long struggle with the spirit of darkness, who seems to have exhausted all his devices in endeavoring to bring her soul to ruin. For at least an hour and a half every day, for fifteen years, he clouded her mind with obscurity, and filled it with the deepest fear, so

that she was sometimes tempted to believe that she was in possession of the demon. Still she withstood with the greatest constancy, and never suffered herself to be overcome. In addition, the evil spirit pitilessly tortured her wasted frame. Once she saw him in a corner of the room, making horrible grimaces at her. Fortifying herself with the sign of the cross, she blew out her candle and dared him to the combat. He accepted the challenge and suddenly taking the form of a giant, he rushed upon her and cruelly tortured her. But he could not prevail; her invincible courage and patience always put him to flight in despair.

So tender was the familiarity which existed between our Lord and Saint Rose, that they seemed like two fond children, bound together by the friendship of innocence, opening to one another their little troubles, and the desires of their hearts. During her work, he used to come to her in the form of a child; and so regular were his visits, that sometimes, when he was late, she would tenderly complain of his neglect. Often, too, he would walk by her side. During one of these visits, Saint Rose showed that she felt hurt because some one had come and gathered her choicest flowers. The Divine child answered:

“Dear Rose, I am the culprit whom you accuse. I was jealous of your love and did not like to see you bestow it on the flowers.”

One day she asked her Divine Visitor for a special favor. Our Lord consented to grant it, if she would give him in return what he should ask. Rose agreed to this condition; and then he said that what he desired most of her was, that

she should continue to suffer for his sake. Saint Rose promised to fulfil his good pleasure, providing he would increase her trials.

The Blessed Virgin, too, as has been said, had a devoted child in Saint Rose ; and she, for her part, loved Rose fondly in return. Confidence and simplicity always win our Lady's heart. She could not refuse anything that Rose ever asked. Many times she paid visits to the Saint, and in later years, when Saint Rose's austerities had made her feverish, and she was in consequence much troubled with drowsiness, our Lady used to come and wake her every morning. Once the poor girl's weakness kept her from obeying the summons; still the Blessed Virgin, her sweet mother, came again, and said to her with a little touch of reproof : " Rose, my child, arise and be not slothful." In every distress, in every undertaking, in every trial, she had recourse to the Blessed Virgin, and never was she disappointed. Rose was more intimate with our Blessed Lady than with her father or mother, or any one upon earth. And indeed no wonder ; for was not little Rose our Lady's adopted daughter ?

Our story is ended. We have endeavored to tell how Saint Rose spent her probation on earth. She lost herself that she might find God. She weighed the things of the world in the balance of the sanctuary, and examined the world's maxims by the light of heavenly wisdom ; and making a right use of every circumstance of her life, she was enabled with God's grace, to rear her throne high among the seats of the just.

Her death occurred on the feast of Saint Bartholomew, August 24, 1617, when she was thirty-one years old. Her

funeral obsequies were celebrated with all the pomp which both the ecclesiastical and the civil power could provide. The Bishop of Guatemala sang the Requiem Mass, and the Archbishop of Lima himself was present at the ceremonies. The chapter, the senate, and the most honorable companies in the city, by turns carried the sacred relics of the Saint to their place of interment. The whole people of Lima were in the deepest mourning, sorrowing for their departed saint. After a due examination into the holiness of her life, and the numerous miracles wrought through her intercession, Pope Clement X., in 1671, solemnly declared her a Saint, and appointed the 30th of August for the celebration of her feast.



SAINT KATHARINE OF SIENA.

I.



MID the din of wars and the tottering of thrones, the lurid sun of the thirteenth century went down. The morning of the fourteenth rose ill-boding for Europe. France, England, Spain, Germany, and Italy were shrouded with the dust that rose from the onset of armed hosts on their battle fields. Louis of Bavaria had for thirty years set two popes at naught, and was now, in 1342, braving Clement VI.; Spain was rent by the cruelty and excesses of her princes; France was beating dirges over the best of her brave, the men who had fallen on the ill-starred plain of Crecy; Rienzi, the would-be liberator of Rome, who had been aping the majesty of the great Julius, was now reeling from the dizzy height to which ambition had led him. In 1348, scarce a vestige remained of the Tribune's authority. "A tumult had raised him upon his lofty pedestal, a tumult dragged him down." Thus in gloomy grandeur passed the first half of the fourteenth century.

It is easy to guess what must have been the moral con-

dition of Europe at this time. Religion appealed in vain to men who were so often startled to arms by the rallying cries of rivals. The flood of depravity burst open even the doors of the sanctuary ; wealth, nobility of birth, the favor of kings, were used as stepping stones to ecclesiastical preferences.

Amid the storms of war and revolution, how fared it with the little patrimony of the Church ? The papal dominions were in possession of a faction that vainly dreamed it could restore the lost republican creations, and renew the pagan splendors of the former mistress of the world. " For a century and a half," says Darras, " Rome had been restless under the honorable yoke of the Holy See: it had become the hot-bed of revolt, the centre of anarchy, and in 1309, Clement V. definitively placed the Roman court at Avignon." Here Clement VI., who wore the tiara in 1342, was little better than an exile.

Such was the state of affairs in Italy. Her sky was overcast with gloom, when through the haze shimmered the star of Katharine of Siena. When the interests of the Church were in most danger, then a champion appeared to do battle for her sake. This champion was not a soldier, not a statesman, not a preacher, not a theologian. She was a timid, bashful maiden. But she had a pure soul to love God, and a heart to feel for men, and a will to do for men. These were the elements that made her a valiant woman.

Katharine of Siena was to her age what Saint Bernard had been to his. She rescued from sin and error many thousand souls, reconciled governments, confounded the casuistry of obsequious theologians, and was the chief instrument in

persuading Gregory XI. to reëstablish in Rome the See of the popes, who for seventy years had been dependent on French hospitality.

II.

KATHARINE, saint and champion of the Church, was born in the year 1347, in Siena, a city of Tuscany. Her parents were Giacomo and Lapa Benincasa. They were not of the elite of Siena, but belonged to what our English phrase calls the middle class of society. Giacomo was a manufacturer of chemicals for dyeing wool. Most probably his trade embraced the preparation of the dyes and the coloring of the wool. He was wealthy enough to rear, if not in luxury, at least in comfort, a large family. The piety of Katharine's parents seems unquestionable, and even if no testimony in their favor had come down to us, assuredly, were it only for her sake, they deserve a high place in our esteem.

Admiring chroniclers are fond of discovering in the cradles of their heroes some slight traits that predict their after greatness. As to our own dear little Katie, why, how precocious she was! What a fascination the cherub **must** have possessed!

An interesting child is held as common property.—Smile on, my full-grown reader, be thou sir, or miss, or madame. If thou thyself wast once an interesting infant, thou wilt know that this is true; if thou wast not, thou wilt never believe it.—Every woman claims a right to pat and kiss the roses on a quiet baby's cheeks. But never was the right exercised so vigorously as in the case of baby Katharine. **Relative**

and neighbor claimed a share in mistress Lapa's treasure. They were continually swooping down with a whirr of caresses on the Benincasa nursery, and carrying off the poor mother's nestling to their own bowers, there to hear birdie Kate chirp, and call, and clap her hands. There they made much of her, and as she grew, made more and more of her, and did all that in woman's power lay to spoil a fellow-woman.

• But do all they could, they were not able to spoil our Katie. What was in the little fairy that she bewitched everybody in this way? The old chronicles do not explain. But they add a story of how at a time when mamma Lapa had fallen into a fit of melancholy, she went into the nursery where her precious bud was folded in sleep, and took her up and kissed her: instantly the sadness was turned into joy, the darkness had fled before the sunlight of her darling's smile.

Soon, very soon our little Saint began the practices which predict the holiness that will be. She was but five years old when she made it a habit to recite a "Hail Mary," and make a genuflection on every step as she went up and down stairs.

III.

BUT now there came a day, and before the child had well entered upon the stage of girlhood, she seemed to ripen into the seriousness of the perfect woman. How was this change brought about?

Katharine had a married sister named Bonaventura, who lived hard by the gates of Siena. One night, as the child

was climbing into her cot (she was about six at this time), Monna Lapa said,

“ Daughter, you and Stephano must pay Bonaventura a visit to-morrow.”

Stephie, Katharine’s little brother, who was supposed to be in the land of dreams, disentangled his head from the bed-clothes, and began to enjoy the holiday there and then ; Katharine only said, “ Yes, mother.”

In the morning the two children, happy as only innocents can be, set out for Bonaventura’s. It was a gala day for them. When at last wearied with sport and amusement they were returning home, Stephie, boy-like, ran on in advance of his sister. They had just reached the Church of Saint Dominic, and, a moment later, a flood of light, grander far than that which even an affluent Tuscan sunset can lavish, fell in cascades, and sparkled, and broke into mist and foam before her eyes, and flashed upon the metal roof of the church. Then she beheld a refulgent throne, and, seated upon it, our Lord. He was clothed in pontifical ornaments, and his sacred brow was adorned with a tiara. Cherub bands were kneeling round the throne, and near our Lord stood Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and Saint John, the Apostle of love.

Sweet and tender was the look that the Lord Christ cast upon his daughter, and he blessed her, as the bishop gives his blessing in the Mass. With her soul rapt by the beauty and the light, Katharine stood in the open square and worshipped the Divinity.

Meanwhile Stephie, thinking his sister was following closely after him, had pressed on, and was now far ahead.

“Sister,” he turned to say, when all at once he missed her.—“Why, where’s Katie?”

The twilight had deepened ; the gray and gold of evening was becoming folded within the black of night. The boy grew afraid.

“I will go back to Saint Dominic’s,” he said to himself ; “she must be praying in the church.”

Alarmed at the thought that they would not be able to reach home before dark, he retraced his steps, and found her praying in the open street.

Her gaze was fixed upon the church roof: his pent up boy-nature could stand it no longer.

“Katie,” he cried, “why don’t you come home?”

The child was in an ecstasy, and gave not any heed to the question.

Growing more impatient, Stephe pulled roughly at her arm, and, really very much frightened at her appearance, shouted energetically,

“Katie, Katie, do come home!”

As who should wake from a sweet sleep, the saintly child turned to the boy and said,

“Oh brother, if you had only seen what I have seen!”

“What was it, Katie?”

But she made no answer, and silently they walked home.

The little maid, as she afterwards told her confessor, had seen beauty, and sublimity and greatness. Never, never more could her heart spend itself upon the idle things of earth: she belonged to heaven, and would live only for the eternal enjoyment of the vision she had seen.

In this wonderful vision, our Lord taught the little

maiden how the Fathers of the Desert had lived. Her soul was filled with a holy emulation. She would imitate their austerities. Urged by this thirst after mortifications, the child used to seek out secret places, where, unperceived, she could discipline herself to blood.

Sanctity is like the rose ; its odor is diffusive ; its beauty, winning. Siena began to be filled with a heaven-born fragrance. Many young girls, witnessing the fair charity of their playmate, shaped their conduct after hers. Soul caught fire from soul. Soon a sodality of young girls was organized. The girl-apostle of Siena assembled them in a quiet room of her father's house. She was chief of this troop of light-armed guerillas, she was Lady Abbess and Mistress of Novices of this convent of irregulars. All penances and prayers were assigned by Katharine.

Siena was filled with conversions. Rich dews of grace fell upon the city. People wondered, and knew not that little Katharine was doing all the good.

IV.

BUT now the beautiful child became more thoughtful, the dimples of her smiles were not so deep. What could be the matter? She was sighing for the desert. Since the vision she had had of our Lord, her mind's eye often spent whole days excursive over the yellow sands and green-lawned oases of the far-off wastes. She searched and searched again, and expected to find some barren spot in the heart of Siena. At night came dreams trooping from far-away caverns which the old anchorets had hal-

lowed into shrines. She must at least see the desert ; she would never be at peace until she had found the quest.

Not stainless Galahad of Arthur's Table Round longed so ardently to see the Holy Grail as saintly little Katharine yearned to reach the places where the holy men of early Christian days had reared their pyramids of prayer.

One morning she set out from home determined never to return until she had seen the places where the anchorets had toiled. And she was resolved, mark you, not to have her expedition fail through lack of provision ; so, with more prudence than belonged to her years, she concealed under her cloak a fresh loaf of bread !

She wandered towards the gates of Siena, and, on reaching them, sallied forth with a stout heart. Now, for the first time in her life, she was outside the walls of her dear native city. When she saw—

“ The fields all full of naked gold
Broad-cast from heaven on lands it loves ”—

“ Soon,” she thought, “ and I will be in the desert ! ”
Cheerily she hied her on.

Siena and its spires and curling towers of smoke grew little and more little. Why, she felt like a hermit already ! Not because her little limbs were aching ; no, poor pet, she thought not of the weariness at all.

Then the little hermitess came to a valley, where the fields were bearded with short yellow stubble after the harvest ; and she said,

“ This must be the desert ! ”

As she went on, suddenly a little cave stood there before

her. Its shelving forehead was pitted by the rain drops of ages.

"This is a very old cave," she thought, "and it is far, very far away from home ; so here we are at last ! Yes, this must be the desert !"

Glad at heart, she entered and fell upon her knees to thank her heavenly father. As she prayed, she was slowly raised from the stone floor till her head touched the vault; and thus she remained suspended in the air for some time. But, young as she was, she suspected the hand of the demon.

"Father in heaven," she prayed, "pity thy poor child !"

God could not abandon his little one, and he said to her that the time had not yet come to leave home, but that she should await his call. At these words from heaven the sainted child was as anxious to return as she had been eager to find the desert.

And now took place a great miracle. The evening was coming on apace when she turned to leave the grotto. The purple air, the sombre cave, the great distance from home—these began to flutter her little heart. All the courage that had accompanied her from home had fled. On the way going, she was an enthusiastic monk of the desert, and now she was only poor, little, shrinking Katie again. But our Father in heaven is the tenderest of all fathers. What will he do for this child of his that loves him so fondly?

As she is anxiously thinking of how she shall reach the city, and is repenting of her boldness in leaving home, lo, an angel comes and lifts her upon his wings, and in the twinkling of an eye carries her back to Siena.

V.

AFTER this adventure Katharine spent the years of her girlhood in holy love of God. Mortifications were daily increased, the prayers of the saintly girl day and night were knocking at the doors of God's eternal home, and she wrought prodigies without prejudice to her humility.

The brightest gems that beam in the sunlight of Heaven's day, are the pearls of purity. Katharine knew their price. So one day as she was praying to Mary Mother, lily of purity, thus she vowed, inspired by heaven:

“Dear Mother, I promise thy Son that I will never accept any spouse but him ; and with his help and grace, no spot shall tarnish my innocence.”

After this vow, all her longing was to enter some convent: And most did she admire the Orders that made the salvation of souls their special object. Such was her love for Saint Dominic and his children, that while she was a little thing, she used to keep on the watch for them, and if any of them passed her father's door, she would rush out and kiss their footsteps behind them.

Thus in holiness did the rose of Siena grow, till her sunny girl-days had passed, and she had ripened into womanhood's full bloom. But the thorns had also grown.

The family knew not of Katharine's vow, knew not that she was already the spouse of Christ. Monna Lapa began to insinuate to her daughter that it would be well to pay more attention to her toilet. Poor Katharine ! What was she to do ? Filial love and obedience said, obey ; but, on the other hand, her solemn promise to God, bade her say, no. As the sea-shell, when held to the ear, speaks of the

far-off waves and caverns deep where it was born, so her vow spoke to her soul of the whiteness of the spirits that minister before God's throne. And a voice, soft and sweet, said,

"Daughter, thou hast chosen the better part."

Lapa soon perceived that this dull young lady made very little progress in the mysteries of the toilet; and her woman's wit prompted her to adopt a cunning device.

"I will try what my clever Bonaventura can do," she said.

"Daughter, Bonaventura has pressed me so earnestly to let you spend some weeks with her, that at last I have consented. So if you can prepare in time I should like you to start to-morrow."

"Dear Mother, you know how I love my sister: I could enjoy nothing so much as a few weeks of her companionship."

"So you could go to-morrow?"

"I am ready now, dear mother." Katharine was not a woman of trunks and parcels.

God sometimes permits his dear ones to lapse into failings, that by making stepping stones of their confusion and sorrow they may rise to higher things.

Bonaventura was a lady of fashion, and had wit enough to succeed in making her artless sister believe that, after all a curl or a ribbon is a harmless thing:

"Why should one refuse to have a beautiful rose in one's hair? Are not brooches and such paraphernalia the acknowledged heritage of the female?"

In short, to please her sister, Katharine consented to trick herself out in finery, and to give art a share in the praises which nature unadorned had won for her. But a whole after-life will atone in weeping for this weakness.

V.

A FEW months went by. Katharine was still living with her sister, when Bonaventura fell ill, and died.

Katharine was saved ; she returned home penitent, and determined to suffer everything sooner than again yield tribute to vanity. Her parents press the suit of a young man who is rich and handsome ; she rejects his proposals. They insist that she shall marry ; they call in a Dominican priest, a friend of the family. He questions her severely and is convinced of her religious vocation.

“ Daughter, be strong, do not yield to any persuasion. God wishes you to serve him perfectly. To show your parents that this is your determination, and that they can never hope to shake it, cut off your hair utterly. Then, peradventure, you may enjoy tranquillity.”

Katharine had sunny hair, and it fell through a gold clasp in deep streams upon her shoulders. Like all mothers, Lapa made her daughter's hair her pride. Without a thought of the sacrifice, sooner than make which, some girls (let us speak it softly)—some girls of your acquaintance, reader—would guillotine themselves, our glorious Kate let her beautiful tresses fall between the scissor's remorseless chaps. So a shower of silken awn from the ripening corn-ear is scattered by the wind. She then got a veil and covered her shorn head.

Lapa, on coming into the place where the dark deed was done, saw the ruin. Like a wounded tigress she sprang upon the enemy, tore the veil from her head and shrieked,

“ Daughter, what have you done ! ”

“ Only to think of it ! the tresses which she had curled

and twined ! Her own flesh and blood to do this thing ! Oh, the fright of a daughter she had now ! ”

The cries of the mother brought all the household to her side, and while they were bitterly declaiming against the deed of profanation, Katharine quietly made her escape.

There and then they resolved by an order in council to crush her resolute will. Submission, or no peace : these were the alternatives. But Katharine did not thereupon lay down her arms. Then a step justified, they thought, by the laws of war was **taken** : a maid-servant was dismissed and the young lady in rebellion had to supply her place.

“ We will spoil your fine fancies, Miss Cinderella ! ”

Her little room was taken from her, and she was allowed no time for prayer ; every expedient was made use of to shake her purpose. But sanctity taketh wings unto itself and soareth upward, and beyond the cliffs that bar.

The Holy Spirit appeared to his persecuted daughter, and taught her how to erect in her soul a safe retreat, a great fortress of prayer, at whose gates and casements storms might beat, without imperilling the security within.

Great souls are sometimes thwarted, sometimes defeated, but they must in the end prevail. The wars at last were brought to a close. Katharine's legions had won a triumph. The manner of it was this. One day Katharine announced that she wished to hold a parley with the enemy. Hoping that at last she was going to surrender, they agreed to listen to what terms she had to propose. As one inspired by heaven she suddenly burst forth into this appeal :

“ My dear father and mother, I have long been silent, but now, at the hazard even of offending you, I must speak.

Do what you will with me, I can never consent to marry, for I have vowed virginity to God. Drive me from home, if it please you; I am well content, though hard it will be to leave you; but still I am firm in my purpose to accept no spouse but my fair Lord Christ, the Crucified."

When she ceased, sobs broke forth from all who were there. And good Giacomo, her father, more deeply moved than the rest, said,

"God forbid that we should any longer oppose our daughter's holy resolution. Let no one dare henceforth to annoy her."

The heart of the Virgin Saint leaped for very joy.

VI.

FREED by her father's speech from further persecution, she flew back to her cell, and resumed her austerities. And here a brief notice of her manner of life will not be out of place. At the age of fifteen, she gave up taking wine. Her ordinary fare was a little bread and a few raw herbs, and even in this scanty repast she found something superfluous. At twenty, she gave up eating bread, and from that time her life may be called a strict fast; for, as all her medical friends asserted, she took nothing adequate to sustain life.

Her couch consisted of a few boards. Over sleep (which Saint Peter of Alcantara declared to be his most persistent foe in the spiritual life)—over sleep, she so prevailed by degrees, that, after her entrance among the Sisters of Penance, she gave to it only a half-hour every other day. She wore around her waist, without any intervening clothing, an iron

girdle, so tightly clasped, that it gradually ate into her flesh, and became almost concealed. And she was not yet twenty years old.

Not any history, not the sacred writings, can point out a parallel in austerities to Katharine of Siena. Paul, the first hermit, lived so long in the desert, that he forgot the faces of men ; but a raven brought him half a loaf every day. The austerities of Saint Anthony were wonderful, wonderful were those of Macarius, Arsenius, Simeon of the Pillar ; but all of these had masters to instruct them, they had incentives in the example of others ; for those sandy wastes brought forth many beautiful plants ; the arid air of the desert was fragrant with blossoms of every virtue.

But our dear Katharine had not been reared in the school of Thebais ; she lived not in a garden where, from every bud, she could sip the dews of virtuous teaching. Nor was she enclosed by convent walls ; she moved amid the bustle of a large family, with not a smile of encouragement ; opposed by all, sometimes held up to ridicule by parents and brothers and sisters ; and still, in the strictness of her fasting, she surpassed all the saints that have ever lived. Moses, it is true, fasted for a space of forty days, two several times ; Elias did so once ; but who shall compare these fasts, rigid though they were, with the long years of fasting endured by our Saint Katharine ? Saint John the Baptist's life was so austere as to excite the wonder of the Jewish nation ; yet a dinner of locusts and wild honey, would have been a sumptuous banquet to Katharine of Siena.

“ God only through his bounty hath thought fit,
Among the powers and princes of the world

To make her an example to mankind,
Which few can reach to."

VII.

AFTER her father had sided with Katharine, and she had been once more established in her cell, she continually urged her parents to permit her to become a Sister of Penance.

The Sisters of Penance, were composed at this time of widowed ladies, and were affiliated with the order of Saint Dominic. Strictly speaking, they took no religious vows, and lived with their families. Lapa, though she loved her daughter fondly, had not yet learned how to love her truly, and she would not hear of Katharine's becoming a Sister. But God was soon to free his dear one from her thralldom. Too long had she been hindered and thwarted. The dove should be uncaged now, and should soar.

She was taken dangerously ill. The men of prescriptions could find no remedy for the disease ; they could pronounce this to be an interesting case, and after that, no more. The poor mother's heart was heavy with sorrow ; she watched and wept by the side of her darling. And once when she asked whether she could do anything to comfort her, Katharine made answer,

" My own sweet mother, you wish me to recover my health, do you not ? to keep me with you longer, do you not ? Well, dear mother, you must obtain admission for me among the Sisters of Penance."

Poor Lapa was afraid to say no, lest God should take

away her darling child. So she promised to try and gratify the longing of Katharine. On the morrow, she went to the church of Saint Dominic to see the Superioress and ask the coveted boon.

But now a new difficulty arose. The Sisters of Penance declined to receive her ; they said that if they were to admit her, it would be a violation of their constitution, which provided that their congregation should consist solely of widows of mature age. They had no cloister, they explained, and each Sister must be capable of guiding her own conduct at home.

Katharine was not to be defeated ; she insisted, and said that God willed her admission. The chapter of Saint Dominic met, and decided to receive her, if (a condition which, at another time, would have been fatal to poor Katharine) she were not too pretty. Three Sisters were accordingly sent to visit the postulant. They found her very ill ; and as for her beauty, they had no way of judging of that, for her face was all scarred and spotted by the malady.

But even if her present plainness had not been judged satisfactory, they would doubtless have reported in her favor. The three Sisters Commissioners were won over chiefly by the eloquence and holiness of her appeal. The result was that the chapter decided to admit her whenever she should be able to go to their church.

Katharine, full of joy at this news, entreated God to restore her to health ; not that she shrank from suffering, but because she was burning to be off to Saint Dominic's to receive the holy habit of the Sisters. Her prayer was heard, and, in a few weeks, in the presence of a number of Sisters of Penance,

and Friars Preachers of Saint Dominic, she put on the black-and-white dress of the Congregation.

She was now happy ; had she not gained the desire of her heart ? True, she had not pronounced the vows of religion, but still she was resolved to keep them. For three years she observed the strictest silence, spoke to no one but her confessor, and never left her cell except to go to church. The few raw herbs that made up her repast were always moistened with her tears.

VIII.

It would be a long task to recount the vigils, the prayers, the sweet consolations, the temptations, the heroic patience of these years. Our Lord Jesus Christ became so familiar with his daughter, that they two were like bosom friends linked together in the closest intimacy. Whether she watched, or prayed, or read, she saw him always at her side. And often it happened that, whilst she was conversing with her friends he would stand before her ; and then her heart would speak with him, while her tongue spoke with man.

Soon after her reception among these good Sisters, as she was one day in prayer, our Lord stood before her and said,

“ Daughter, know what thou art and who I am. This knowledge is the secret of happiness. Thou art what is not, and I am who am.”

If men could but learn these two lessons—their nothingness, and God’s greatness, surely then they would be happy, surely then they would never dare to sin against such majesty.

At another time our Lord said to her,
“Think of me and I will never forget thee.”

By this admonition and promise of our Lord she was taught how to lay the deep, broad bases of the spiritual life. The soul that lives for God wastes not the smallest bead of sap in supplying nourishment to the passions, the offshoots of self; and that soul having, like the cedars of Libanus, her roots near deep waters, near the deep fountains of God's love, will be beautiful for her greatness and the spreading of her branches, and will blossom and bear fruit in the paradise of God.

And here a voice from some brave but faint heart, that has tried again and again and failed, breaks in and makes its moan:

“Ah ! no wonder Katharine of Siena was so great a saint, for she was always enjoying the sweets of heaven ; it is easy to be holy while consolations are dewed upon the soul.”

Easy to be holy ! Poor heart, it had almost been written here that no holiness can be easy ; but there came the timely thought of that which hath been already writ, of that which he himself, the Holiness, hath said : “ My yoke is sweet and my burden light.”

IX.

BUT to Katharine fair was not always to befall. Our Lord was only strengthening her for the day of temptation. She was soon to prove her prowess against the dark legions of the pit. Pandemonium knew that it was addressing itself to a stubborn conflict. It feared defeat. First from

the abyss came up a troop vested in impurity most foul ; armed with lusts, loathsome, abominable. It seemed as if the foulness of the infernal fens would deluge the lily maid. But she lashed herself with whips, until she encircled herself with streams of her pure blood. Then she girded on an iron chain, studded all over with metal points that pierced her frame ; and day and night she kept vigil.

Three days went by, and the first troop sank in disgrace into the waves of hell. Next arose a sympathetic band :

“Poor child, what boots it, all this praying, all this watching, all this fasting? Surely she can not endure much longer. Is it not better for her to begin now and gradually give them up, than some day to be forced to do so all at once?”

“I trust in the arm of God, and not in my own strength,” returned the heroine.

The demons were once more routed.

Again came in full cry the hounds that made the first attack. This time they fought with desperation: the holy maiden had to fly from room to room. Do what she would, it was impossible to chase away the fiends.

But her chalice had not yet received its crowning drops ; her divine spouse, who had usually come to visit and comfort her, seemed now to abandon her : not one ray of consolation fell upon her soul. The tempest was swelling and Jesus slept. But not one moment did she retrench from her usual time of prayer, and not one stroke less did she give her tender frame.

Several days passed thus. At length one of the hell-pack indignant that a slight woman could laugh them to scorn, cried.

‘ Miserable soul ! Will you always be able thus to defy us ? We will torment you to death ! ’

“ I have chosen sufferings for my consolations. It will not be hard, it will be delightful, for me to continue thus as long as the Lord my God may wish.”

The demons, like vermin in a dungeon to which light is suddenly admitted, scoured away to their dark refuge before the calmness and courage of the Saint : and a soft dawn came through the window of her cell, and fell around her with a promise of peace. And in the mellow radiance came our Lord : he appeared hanging on the cross. After graciously wishing her joy of her victory he said,

“ Katharine, remember what I have suffered for thy sake, and it will never be painful to suffer for me.”

“ But, fairest Lord, where wast thou when I was so tormented ? ”

“ My daughter, I was in the midst of thy heart ! ”

After this probation of his servant, our Lord told her that he would espouse her in faith and in troth.

XI.

THE season of Lent drew near. It was the beginning of the carnival, and while all the rest of the household were enjoying the festivities, Katharine was in her cell praying God to pardon the offences of these days. But her fidelity was to win a reward ; for the cell became lit up with the light of heaven, and the gates of God’s city were flung open and through them passed downward a nuptial

train. The Lord Christ and his Lady Mother, with Saint John, the disciple of love, Saint Paul the Apostle, and Saint Dominic entered the Saint's little cell. And David, the divine seer, had come with his harp, and from its cords rippled waves of music soft and low, that beat upon Katharine's heart.

Our Lady now came forward, and taking the maiden's hand, she offered it to her son, Jesus : he graciously clasped it, and placed upon one of the fingers a gold ring set with four large rubies, among which a diamond seemed to take fire from the light, and flash. And as he drew the ring on her finger, he said,

"I, thy Creator and Redeemer, espouse thee in faith and in troth, and thou shalt preserve thy troth pure, until we celebrate together in heaven the eternal nuptials of the Lamb. Daughter, be of good courage, and do the work that Providence will confide to thee ; thou art armed with faith, and shalt triumph over thy enemies."

Thus ended the ceremony of the nuptials contracted between the Creator and the creature. And Katharine acknowledged to her confessor that, though it was invisible to others, she could always see the ring upon her finger.

If we consider the circumstances of the time, the great apostolate of the Saint, and the political influence she exerted notwithstanding the weakness of her sex, we may not question that she received this pledge of our Saviour's perpetual love and protection.

Soon she shall leave her cell to mingle in the world of action. Untutored as she is, she shall rebuke the arrogance of the proud. Diplomatsists shall be put to the blush by her

address, and they shall acknowledge that this woman has all the state-craft necessary to make a statesman. She shall be seen in the hospitals the while, nursing and cheering the sick. In the consistory of Cardinals she shall be the defender of the Church, she shall cleave to the side of the rightful Pope, and the arguments of French theologians shall be found shallow, when Katharine, the Roman Catholic, shall sound them with the plummet of the truth.

XII.

KATHARINE first appeared before the public of Siena as the apostle of the poor. Her charities prove that her father's wealth was considerable. Good Giacomo had given her leave to distribute alms without stint.

“Let no one,” he had said, “prevent my beloved child from bestowing what alms she pleases; I grant her full liberty; indeed she may, if she likes, give away everything in the house.”

Katharine used the permission almost literally, and whenever it was rumored that this commissioned marauder had it in mind to lift some plunder for her pensioners, there was hurrying to and fro on the part of the dismayed household to save their wardrobes from falling into the hands of the enemy.

In the morning one might see her carrying wine and oil and every necessary to her dear little ones, the poor. And he who will not let a cup of cold water, given in his name, go unrecorded, was pleased with her free-handed generosity, and used to accompany her on these visits; and as it

frequently happened that the poor were sleeping soundly when Katharine came to their houses, our Lord, with that touch of his against which nothing can remain closed, would open the doors and quietly admit his daughter.

One day, our lady bountiful being in the church, a poor man came and asked some alms of her for the love of God. She had nothing with her that she could give him.

"I will go home," she said, "and procure some assistance for you."

No, that would'nt do ; he was in a hurry, this special mendicant.

"Madame," he said, "if you have anything to give, give it quickly, for I can't wait."

He was rather positive, you see. I wonder now whether Lady Katharine took any notice of the man's importunity ? Clever she was enough, but simple as a dove withal, and, my word for it she thought it quite natural that the man should have some pressing matter to attend to, and consequently that it was perfectly right for him to be in a hurry. Her heart sank however at the thought that she could not aid him, and she was about to dismiss the petitioner, when her eyes fell upon a little silver cross of hers hanging from a Pater-Noster cord.

"Here, good sir, take this," she said, as she eagerly handed the cross to the stranger, "it is all I can give you."

That night our Lord visited her cell.

"Daughter," he asked, "did you ever see this cross before?"

She looked, and saw a silver cross glittering with diamonds.

"Yes, Lord, it once was mine, but it was not so handsome then."

"Yesterday," he said, "you gave it to me : and to-day, see how rich it is with the gem of your love ! And I make you a promise that on the day of judgment I will return it and tell the story of it in the presence of all arisen men."

XIII.

KATHARINE loved the poor dearly, but her tenderness and charity were supreme in caring for the sick. Her whole soul was in her task. She washed and dressed the most disgusting sores with promptness so glad, that one might think this was her most delightful occupation. Her heroism filled Siena with astonishment and admiration.

Fair reader, if thou be of dainty stomach, prithee skip the story next ensuing.

One of the Sisters of Penance, Andrea by name, was very ill with a cancer, that was eating away her chest. The odor from the wound was so noisome that the boldest approached her with their avenues of smell firmly closed.

"Who should attend Sister Andrea ?" This was the query of the sisterhood. Now be it known that the Sisters of Penance were good and holy ; but they all had the woman weakness and were liable to faint ; such nurses, therefore, were out of place at the bedside of Andrea. I said they all had the woman weakness : but no ; one there was who had it not, the youngest and fairest of them all, and that one was Katharine, the ministering angel of the sick.

Katharine, then, was elected by an unanimous vote to

nurse Sister Andrea. Come, let us accompany her on a morning visit to her patient. Here we are at the house,—no need to knock, for no one but Andrea is at home, and she, poor soul, is unable to answer any summons. Katharine has just gone in ; let us enter.

“ Ah ! Katharine,” Sister Andrea cries, “you here so early : God bless you, daughter ! Oh, I have had a weary night, I thought I should have died.” “ Died ! ” she sobbed, “and not a friendly look to cheer me.”

Katharine turns her face away to hide her tears ; then recollecting herself she prepares to dress the wound.

And, fair visitor, if thou wouldst tarry longer here with Katharine, make ready with thy vial of salts.

One linen is removed from Andrea’s breast, and the odor becomes sickening. Katharine bends over and lifts the others, and see ! there is the loathsome, living thing, a life inflicting death. What ! is Katharine fainting ? Her pale, twitching lips betray the struggle. Andrea has noticed something unusual :

“ Katharine,” she urges, “ Katharine, my daughter, go to the window, you have need of air.”

“ What ! ” says Katharine to herself as she reflects that she has weakly turned and left the bedside of the patient, “ thou art disgusted at thy sister, who has been redeemed by the blood of Christ ! Thou shalt not remain unpunished ! ”

She comes again to the bedside, and stooping down over the breast of Andrea,—no, it cannot be that she is sipping the cancer !—yes, it is so ! Andrea feels the warm lips of the Saint drinking the matter from the sore.

“ Cease, daughter ! would you poison yourself with the dreadful corruption ? ”

But Katharine raises not her head, until she feels that she has overcome her disgust, and triumphed over the revolt of nature.

Reader, perhaps we have tarried here too long: let us go.

XIV.

IN one of the hospitals of Siena, there lay an old leprous woman called Tecca. The hospital was very poorly supported; and as Tecca's leprosy became worse, the authorities were for removing her outside of the city. Our noble Katharine heard the story, and her heart was touched.

Was this poor leprous woman to die forsaken? was there no one in the whole of Siena bold enough to nurse her? Ah! yes, even as Tecca is on the point of being cast forth, along the gloomy corridor comes a lady, young and beautiful; see, she kneels by the leper's couch and kisses her.

"Ah, sister, why did I not know sooner that you were here?"

"They are going to thrust me out of the city," sobbed Tecca, "and leave me to rot and die alone!"

"Never," said the lady, "I will nurse you, and supply everything you want, and be your servant as long as you live."

True to her promise, every morning and evening Katharine visited the leper, and ministered to her in all her wants. Everything went well for some weeks. And now Mistress Tecca seeing the charity and humility of the Saint, waxed irritable and arrogant. So exacting did the leper become, that if Katharine arrived at the hospital a little later than usual she was welcomed with the greeting,

“Good morning, my lady, my Queen of Fonte-Branda,” (this was the name of the quarter of the city in which Katharine lived) “your majesty is late. How very attractive the Church of the Friars must be! for there, I am sure, you have wasted all this forenoon!”

“Yes, Tecca, I am late, it is true; but soon all your little wants shall be attended to.”

And then Katharine would light the fire, and prepare her patient's food, and all this, with such promptness, that Tecca, testy and choleric as she was, would be forced to confess that Katharine Benincasa was the mildest and most patient girl in Siena.

And thus charity triumphed over this sour old person.

During all this time Katharine's mother was haunted with fear on account of her darling.

“Child, child,” she used to exclaim, “you will surely take the leprosy if you continue to visit Tecca!”

“And, dearest mother, would you have me abandon this hapless sister? You are so kind, mother, and you know very well that were I to forsake poor Tecca, no one would take care of her, and she would die. No, no, I can never be so heartless. And you know, dear mother, that there is nothing to fear. Has not providence confided this work to me? And surely providence will never forsake me.”

But God wished to make further trial of his daughter: her fingers and hands became covered with the white scales of the disease. The Benincasas were now thoroughly frightened; but as for Katharine, she was even more assiduous than before in her care of the leper. Tecca died. Her body was a mass of corruption. Katharine washed it, dressed it,

laid it out, and buried it herself. This was consummate charity, and merited a reward. The disease suddenly left her, and her hands became rosy-white like an infant's.

XV.

BUT the special mission of the Sienese maiden was to win souls to God. The lawless she brought to be law abiding. Criminals the most abandoned were by her prayers and exhortations filled with compunction for their sins. By the bed where life was struggling against the invader, death, and from which steamed up to heaven the reek of an ill-spent life, Katharine knelt, and besought mercy for the sinner. How many souls she won back to God, and how often she brought cheer to the last hours of wrecked and wretched lives, let the angel who keeps heaven's records read out on the last day.

Francesco Tolomei, neighbor of the Benincasas, had a wild family of sons and daughters. Giacomo, the eldest son of the Tolomeis, was a swaggering, blustering bully, a fellow whom it was safer to pass with a nod of recognition, than with a look of distrust. He was still young and he had already committed two murders. His brutality and his revengeful nature made him the terror of Siena.

Such was the ruffian whom Katharine of Siena chanced to anger.

It happened thus: Rabes, the mother of the Tolomei, a worthy dame, it seems, although not blessed in her children, had a daughter named Ghinoccia, who was full of vanity, and too fond of the world's ways. Rabes came to Katharine

and asked her to try to turn Ghinoccia's thoughts into a more serious channel.

Katharine succeeded so well with Rabes' daughter, that she became a good girl and bent all her efforts towards leading a holy life. She cut off her glossy tresses; with them fell her vanity, and she entered among the Sisters of Penance. Francesca, Ghinoccia's sister, followed her example, and Siena was now as much charmed with the goodness and piety of the two sisters as it had been before scandalized by their frivolity.

What did Giacomo Tolomei think of these conversions? He was absent from the city at the time of their occurrence, but as soon as the news reached him, he flew into a rage, and swore he would tear the habit from Ghinoccia's back and carry her off with him.

"Giacomo," said his little brother prophetically, "if you go to Siena, you'll be converted, and you'll have to confess your sins."

"Take that, you whelp!" and the brutal man struck the little fellow in the face. "Be converted! I'll kill every priest and nun in Siena sooner than let them trap me!"

"Yes, you will, Giacomo, yes, you will be converted, if you go to Siena, and Katharine Benincasa will do it!"

It was well for the boy that he was swift of foot, for surely if Giacomo had laid hands on him he would have made him pay dearly for his boldness. On reaching Siena, Giacomo entered his mother's house in a fury.

"Where are Ghinoccia and Francesca!" he savagely shouted; "I'll soon strip off their sanctimonious duds. Get them ready, mother, to come with me!"

“Son, why this anger? Surely, you would not do any harm to your sisters!”

“Mother, they must throw off these widows’ weeds I hear they are tricked out in, and come with me!”

At length Rabes succeeded in calming his passion, and induced him to wait until the next day; she then sent secretly to let Father Tomaso know what had happened.

In the morning, Fra. Tomaso and Fra. Bartolomeo came to Tolomei’s house, to have an interview with the redoubtable Giacomo. But he swore and flew into a passion and growled out,

“They shan’t convert me!”

But they did. At length, after much coaxing on the part of Rabes, Giacomo consented to meet the reverend fathers. But what part was Katharine playing in this conversion? She knew that the two priests were engaged with Tolomei, and her hands were lifted in prayer for their success. Enlightened by heaven, she witnessed the failure of their first efforts, and she again prayed for the young man; and our Lord heard her cry for mercy, and touched his obdurate heart.

Scarcely had Fra. Bartolomeo uttered a few more words of appeal, when the young man showed signs of repentance. And not only did he promise to permit his sisters to serve God in peace, but he also humbled himself and confessed his sins with heartfelt sorrow. The tiger had become as gentle as a lamb, and all the city was filled with astonishment. And thus, after all, Tolomei’s little brother spoke truly when he said,

“Giacomo, if you go to Siena, Katharine Benincasa will convert you.”

XVI.

ANDREA VANNI, the next conquest of Katharine's zeal, was the very opposite of Giacomo Tolomei. Rich, clever, fascinating, Vanni was the most observed among the golden youth of Siena. His eyes, dark and cold, and his sardonic smile, told that he could delay vengeance, but that he would scarcely pardon an affront. And well he knew what men could be of use to him if he wished to rid himself of an enemy. Several murders had been committed ; many suspected their author ; but he would be a daring man who should attempt to fasten these crimes upon Vanni.

Messages were often carried to him from men who would rather have him for a friend than for a foe, but invariably,

"Surely, gentlemen, you are deceived," the hypocrite would say ; "upon my honor, I am a stranger to the affair you mention. Offended ! not at all, sirs ; and as for a reconciliation with your friend, if it depended on my promptness and willingness, it would be brought about very soon."

And thus shrewdly he thwarted every effort at mediation, so as to be able to feed fat his grudges.

Katharine was well acquainted with Vanni's character, and she was heard to say, that if she could only get to speak with him, she was sure she could put a stop to the mischief he was doing ; but Vanni carefully avoided her. At last Fra. Guglielmo, of the Hermits of St. Augustine, by dint of persuasion brought Vanni to consent to pay a visit to Katharine.

"I will see this lady, Father, but I cannot promise you that I shall do what she asks of me."

The rest may be told in the words of Father Raymond :

"I was at Signor Benincasa's," he says, "awaiting the return of Katharine, who was not at home at the moment I called, when a servant announced that a gentleman wished to see the lady Katharine, so I went down and found Vanni.

"Good morning, sir," said Vanni with a polite bow, "I came to speak with the lady Katharine, but I find she is not at home, and"—

"But she will be here shortly," I interrupted, fearing that he would go away, and that this golden chance of his conversion would be lost forever.

To while away the time till Katharine's return, I showed him her little cell. But the fashionable Vanni could find no interest in things of that kind.

"I promised Fra. Guglielmo to pay a visit to this lady ; but as she is not at home, and my engagements will not allow me to prolong my stay, will you be so kind, sir, as to excuse me, for, really, I am so pressed that I cannot tarry a moment longer."

Was everything then to end thus, everything we had expected from this visit? My heart was heavy. I began to speak to Vanni of a change of life, but I felt that my words made no impression; and when I had done,

"You are a priest, sir," he said, "and this lady Katharine is esteemed very highly : I must not play false with either of you. I tell you frankly, sir, I will do nothing in the way of being reconciled with my enemies. I rely on your honor that you will never tell this to any one. One little word of mine, and all would be ended; but that word I will never speak !"

He rose from his feet as he pronounced these words, and

went to the door; but the sweet smile of Katharine, who had just returned, stopped him in the hall-way, and again we entered the room.

Vanni repeated to Katharine what he had just told me, and declared again that he would make no concessions.

With force and sweetness Katharine showed him the danger to which he was exposing his soul ; but he had steeled his heart, and he remained unmoved. Then she went apart for a moment and had recourse to God in prayer. To gain time, I entered into a discussion with Vanni. Only a few moments had Katharine been praying, when he said,

“ I will not be so discourteous as to refuse you a'l that you ask : I have four enmities ; now, I will give up one of these to gratify you.”

He rose, and was about to leave the room, when on a sudden he exclaimed,

“ My God ! what sweetness fills my soul on account of this little word of peace that I have spoken ! ” and then, while still making an effort to go,

“ What power holds me back ? I am trying to leave this house and I cannot stir. Yes, my God ! I am conquered. Oh ! I cannot draw my breath ! ”

Then falling on his knees he sobbed,

“ Dear lady, see, I am ready to do any thing you ask. Hitherto Satan has held me in chains, but henceforth I resign myself into your hands.”

And thus was Vanni led to renounce his deadly animosities. A few days passed, and the Governor of Siena had him arrested and thrown into prison, and a rumor ran

among the people that he was to be executed. Father Raymond was much afflicted, and came to Katharine to know what she thought of the affair.

“Fear not, Father, Vanni will persevere in the way he has begun, and He who rescued him from his sins, will also extricate him from this danger.”

And so it happened. On the payment of a heavy fine, Vanni was released from prison. He remained constant to the end. To show his gratitude to Katharine for her charity towards him, he made over to her by deed a beautiful villa of his, about two miles from Siena, where she established a convent.

This short sketch cannot attempt to recount how many ruffians like Giacomo Tolomei and haughty spirits like Vanni, were brought low in penitence by a few words shot like arrows at their hearts by a timid maiden; how she wept as she saw two brigands drawn on a hurdle to execution; how she prayed for them, and how grace in soothing streams flowed over their souls, and turned the blaspheming convicts into penitents, heart-broken with sorrow.

Not less truly than Saint Jerome said of Paula, may it be said of Katharine: “Were I gifted with a thousand tongues, it would be impossible to enumerate the fruits of salvation borne by this virginal plant, and cultivated by the Father in Heaven.”

Her confessor, Raymond De La Vigne, takes the witness-stand, and thus he bears testimony in the sight of Heaven: “I have often seen thousands of men and women hastening to her from the summits of the mountains and from the surrounding country, as though a mysterious trumpet invited them:

they came to see and to hear; her words were sometimes needless, her presence alone sufficed to convert them and inspire them with a lively contrition. All renounced their sins, and sought the tribunal of penance. When they were prostrate at my feet, then I was a witness of the sincerity of their repentance, and it was evident to me that a superabundant grace was operating in their hearts. And this happened not once, nor twice, but many times."

Gregory XI., astonished and pleased at the wonders wrought in souls, granted to Fr. Raymond and two other priests, in favor of all those who came to consult Katharine and afterwards went to confession, the power of absolving in cases usually reserved to bishops. That the number of these penitents was enormous, is proved by the testimony of Fr. Raymond: he says, "We sometimes remained in the confessional fasting till evening, and still we were not able to hear all who presented themselves."

XVII.

To some minds, the graces which are here related as having been bestowed on the holy maiden, may appear the dreams of her own fancy. Not for such as these is this story of Saint Katharine written; it is meant only for generous and ingenuous hearts, who will reverence the manifestations which God makes in his Saints, and will shrink from demanding to know the why and the wherefore of Heaven's ways.

It was an ordinary occurrence for our dear Saint, when she was present at Mass, to behold a lovely child in the

Host, at the moment of consecration. According to Father Raymond, when she was on the point of receiving Holy Communion, the sacred particle used to fly from his fingers to the tongue of the fervent maiden. And once (miracle of love and goodness !) our Lord gave her Communion with his own hand.

Growing purer and more pure in her affections, she asked God to take away her heart, because she could not make it wholly his. And our Lord came, and opened her side, and bore her heart away. A few days went by, and Katharine was in Saint Dominic's ; heaven's gates were suddenly opened, and our Lord, clothed in beauty and light, came down to earth. He had brought his own heart to Katharine in return for hers.

"Daughter," he said, "I have come to give you my own heart."

And then he made an opening in her side, and having placed his heart within it, he bade her farewell. A red scar ever afterwards remained upon her side, and was seen by many of her companions.

It was at Pisa, in the Church of Saint Christiana, that our Lord bestowed the sacred stigmata upon her. She had just received holy communion, and, as usually happened to her after partaking of the heavenly banquet, she was rapt in ecstasy. Her face was flushed with the caresses of divine love, her frame was erect and rigid, and thus she remained for some time. Then, all in a moment, she fell heavily, and as one smitten by a mortal wound, upon the church floor. When consciousness returned, Father Raymond, who stood by, asked her what had happened.

“Father, our Saviour has imprinted upon me his five sacred wounds.”

She had won by love the stars which humiliation had won for him on Calvary.

“But, daughter, I do not see any wounds upon your hands.”

“I besought our Lord to spare me confusion, and he granted my prayer; he has made them invisible to the eyes of men.”

XVIII.

A FEW words of the influence which the maid of Siena had upon her times: Katharine was a great woman; she had a soul that fitted her for a high mission, and she accomplished that mission; and her memory is kept among all men, because “great things done endure.” The genius that the valiant woman of Siena possessed was first shown to Christendom in 1375. Pope Urban V. died at Avignon on the 19th of December, 1370. His successor was the illustrious Cardinal Pietro Roger of Beaufort, who took the name of Gregory XI., and was the last of the French popes.

Italy at this time was quiet; but its calm was only the sultry lull of tropical climes, the surest harbinger of the tornado.

In the month of November, 1375, Milan joined Florence in the effort to crush the pontifical power. John Hawkwood, an English adventurer, with his band of Free Companions, was hired by Barnabo Visconti and the Milanese lords.

These marauders plundered all the towns of the Romagna

and the Marches of Ancona. "Liberty," that hollow word which heaven is weary of hearing applied with distorted meaning, was emblazoned in golden letters upon their standards. "The inhabitants," says Darras, "expecting no help from the Pope, joined the freebooters, and ravaged the whole country."

The Romagna and the Marches of Ancona had given the lead; then, like the rush of an avalanche, the revolt spread, and Viterbo, Perugia, Assisi, Spoleto, Civita Vecchia, Ravenna, and Ascoli threw off the authority of the papal government.

It was the hour for the Maiden of Siena. She left her cell, and by her zeal and eloquence kept the Tuscan republic from joining in the rebellion. While she was exhorting her countrymen to fidelity, the Pope's Breton army crossed the Alps, and, swearing that if the sun could enter Italy, they should enter also, were soon cudgelling the rebels about the ears.

Robert of Geneva, Cardinal Legate, after many unsuccessful attempts at bringing about a peace, sent the Church's sentence forth, and laid Florence under an interdict. The hand of the Pope fell crushing upon the rebellious states: the Florentine diplomatist was banished from every court in Europe, the Florentine merchant found no market for his goods.

But the curse was heaviest at home. The people of Florence, stubborn though they were, durst no longer resist the papal authority, and the chiefs of the republic, terrified by the display of vigor, began to think of treating for peace. But where find a mediator between them and the outraged

Pontiff? There was but one person in Europe who could plead for them successfully, and that one was Katharine of Siena.

She was twenty-nine years of age when the men of Florence, deeming that she would be their best defender before the court at Avignon, summoned her to their capital. The entrance of the maiden into Florence was like a king's progress. She who yesterday was but a tradesman's daughter, to-day is to be made the plenipotentiary of a great republic.

The whole city went out to meet her, and begged her to be their mediator with the Pope. She could not resist the appeal.

“With maiden's palm she lifted up
The sick time's blood-embittered cup,
And in her maiden garments furled
The faint limbs of a wounded world.”

Katharine was received by Gregory XI. with the greatest respect and deference. The perfumes exhaled by her virtues had not been confined to Italy; the wild winds of the fourteenth century had blown them all over Europe. It was the best proof of the holy Father's respect for the ability and virtue of the Saint, that he left the conditions of peace entirely to her judgment, only recommending her to keep safe the honor of the Church. Clothed with these ample powers, this woman, this Ambassador of Florence, would soon have smoothed the road of repentance, and brought about amicable relations, had not her efforts been frustrated by the perfidy of the Florentines themselves.

XIX.

FOILED in one mission by the very people whom she represented, she was successful in another and a greater. For

seventy years the Eternal City had been widowed of the papacy. The heritage of Peter was being wasted, and princes were arrogantly encroaching upon its domain. To lead the Popes back again to Rome was the next mission of the Maiden of Siena. The work required great strength of mind and skill in diplomacy. French cardinals were in the majority in the Sacred College, and the lull of security they enjoyed in their palaces on the banks of the Rhone and Durance was preferable to life amid the eternal factions that were the curse of Rome. Moreover, a French pope was sitting on the throne of Peter. But the resolute Katharine was not deterred even by difficulties such as these. Her arguments confounded the objections advanced by the wisdom of the cardinals; her boldness animated Gregory XI.

“In the name of Jesus Christ crucified, I say to you that you should start as soon as you can for Rome.”

This boldness of Katharine has been sung in fitter words than any other which can be written here:—

What doest thou here ?
Lo, in thine ears, before thy feet
Thy lost sheep bleat,
And strange men feed on faultless lives,
And there is blood, and men put knives,
Shepherd, into the young lambs' throat;
And one hath eaten, and one smote,
And one had hunger and is fed
Full of the flesh of these, and red
With blood of those, as who drinks wine,
And God knoweth, who hath sent thee a sign,
If these were thine.

The arguments and burning words of the Saint decided Gregory to return to Rome. It was on the 13th of September, 1376, that Gregory XI., for the last time looked on the pontifical palace and city of Avignon.

“Great God!” exclaims an eye-witness of the scene, “who can express the tears and sighs and wails to which the cardinals then gave free course? The Pope himself wept.”

Established at Rome, Gregory commissioned Katharine to go again to Florence, and strive to bring about peace with the Church. It was a dangerous undertaking, but her zeal surmounted every obstacle.

“Clothed with calm love and clear desire,
She went forth in her soul's attire,
A missive fire.
Across the might of men that strove
It shone, and over heads of kings;
And molten in red flames of love
Were swords and many monstrous things.”

During the three months that she lived in Florence her life was in continual peril. But the stiletto of the hired assassin, and the menaces of paltering men were unable to crush the great Katharine. She knew her post was there, and she would not desert it. Peace was at length established between the shepherd and the flock :

“And shields were lowered, and snapt were spears,
And sweeter tuned the clamorous years;
And faith came back and peace.”

XX.

No sooner was the treaty signed, than Katharine flew back to the long-deserted cell in her home at Siena. For years the pure stream of her life had flowed among the tossing billows of the world; but it had glided through the sea as did the fabled fount of Arethusa; not a trace of the salt wave had tainted the sweetness of its waters.

It was immediately after her return that she dictated her admirable work on the spiritual life. The rest allowed her after these long labors at Florence was destined to be very short. Gregory XI. died at Anagni, March 27, 1378, and Bartholemew Prignano, Archbishop of Bari, was elected his successor. The new Pope took the name of Urban VI., and was acknowledged by all Christendom.

Three months had passed since the election, and murmurs were heard among the cardinals. Urban VI. was a reformer. The cardinals asked him to return to Avignon, and he refused: the murmurs thereupon became a clamor. The cardinals met at Anagni, to hold a new election, alleging that the former one was invalid, because it had not been free. Only three Italians remained with the Pope, and these were soon seduced from their allegiance. "While the papal robes," says Darras, "were rent by schism, while ambition and intrigue scattered the men that should have stood by him to the last, Katharine of Siena hastened to Rome and gave to the Sovereign Pontiff the help of her virtue and burning eloquence."

"Can it be true," she wrote to the Cardinals at Anagni, "that you, who should be the bucklers of the faith, the defenders of the Church, the pastors of the flock, have be-

come hirelings, and ungrateful children? For you know the truth; you know, and have repeatedly proclaimed, that Urban VI. is the rightful Pope, that his election was rather the work of a heavenly inspiration than of your worldly wisdom. To what then can your change of mind be ascribed if not to the venom of self-love, which poisons the world? Thus it is that instead of standing firm as the pillars of the sacred edifice, you are borne like chaff before the winds. Instead of shedding abroad the sweet odor of holiness as flowers of the Church, you infect it with your pestilential error, instead of shining as lights set upon a mountain, you have become followers of the angel of darkness."

But this admirable letter failed. The traitorous cardinals quitted Anagni, and went, at the solicitation of Joanna, Queen of Naples, to Fondi, a city of the Neapolitan States. Here they met in conclave, and, to the scandal of the Christian world, elected an Antipope, Robert of Geneva, who took the name of Clement VII.

The heart of Katharine, the Catholic, was almost crushed under the load of sorrow; her whole soul went forth in protest against the schismatical election. So far did her zeal carry her, that she would have gone to the court of Joanna, that faithless Queen of Naples, had not Urban, fearing for her life, dissuaded her.

XXI.

BUT Katharine wrought more by prayer than by spoken exhortation and written protest. Day and night she wept over the Pope's misfortunes. We know that she saved his

life at the sacrifice of her own. As she had lived for the interests of the Church, so she would die for them. After the schismatics, who had hitherto remained masters of the Castle of Saint Angelo, had been reduced to submission, and their chiefs taken, Urban chanced to offend, in some manner, the Romans who had remained faithful to him. The populace, maddened by tormenting demons, would have murdered the Supreme Pontiff, had not Katharine's prayers preserved the world from witnessing such an infamy. She wrote to Father Raymond about this time, and said that in spirit she had seen Rome filled with demons, who excited the people to parricide and uttered horrible cries against herself :

"Cursed be thou that would'st arrest us," they said, 'yea, but we will put thee to death in most frightful fashion!"

Three days and nights she lifted hands of prayer to God for that people, imploring him to save the Sovereign Pontiff, and not allow the Romans to commit that abominable crime. And the God of Israel made answer : "Suffer this nation which daily blasphemes my name to kill my Vicegerent, Urban, and when the deed is done, I will take vengeance and will destroy this people, because my justice demands that I no longer support their iniquities."

Then Katharine offered herself to God to die for the Church. This was her prayer : "Lord, for that thy justice must be satisfied, despise not, I entreat thee, my prayer; inflict on my person the chastisement merited by this people of Rome. Yes, for the honor of thy name, and the honor of thy holy Church, I will cheerfully drain the chalice of suffering and death, and thy truth knows that I have

ever ardently desired to do this, and that with this desire thy grace has continually inflamed my soul."

On Sexagesima Sunday the powers of darkness were given license to spend their rage on Katharine. What she endured is best told in her confessor's words: "She had wasted away till the skin clung to her bones, she was like a skeleton issuing from the tomb, she walked, prayed and worked; but to see her, one would take her to be a ghost, rather than a living being."

Heroic woman, not thus could thy patience be subdued!

The demons would gnash their teeth and shriek,

"Cursed one! thou hast always pursued us, and now thou dost design to force us out of Rome, but we will take thy life!"

And then they would lash her wasted frame. Their fur, lasted from Sexagesima Sunday until the close of Lent; but their cruelty wrought in vain and their fury was an idle thing.

XXII.

SUNDAY, the 29th of April, 1380, had come. In a room on the ground floor of a little house situated between the Minerva and the Campo di Fiore, in the city of Rome, Katharine of Siena is breathing her last. Let us go in and bid our Princess farewell before she passes on to her coronation.

The dying Saint is reclining on a low couch, her head resting upon the shoulder of Sister Alessia. A little table is arranged before her, with a crucifix upon it, and as her eyes are fading, their last gaze is fixed upon the image of our Saviour. Hark, she is going to speak,

“Yes, Lord, thou callest me, and I go to thee ; I go, not on account of my own merits, but because of thy mercy ; and that mercy I implore, in the name of thy precious blood.”

With feverish thirst she cried:

“O blood, O precious blood !”

Her breath grows feebler, she faintly speaks the words our Saviour spoke on the cross :

“Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

And the Father at that moment tenderly took back into his hands the beautiful spirit he had made.

And now the slumber of death is upon the pain-worn frame. There upon a low couch lie the sacred relics of Katharine of Siena ; and the rich sunlight of Italy comes through the window, and kisses the cold lips, and sleeps upon the chilly breast.


Katharine was thirty-three years old when she died : Pius II. canonized her in 1461. Urban VIII. fixed her festival for April 30th.

If any one should earnestly desire to know what was the secret of this woman's power, the answer is: her humility. Humility, not pride, can scale the battlements of the city of God. Humility raises the saints high, and seats them on the thrones left vacant by the fallen cherubs. Humility is strength: she is the mother of greatness.



SAINT GENEVIEVE.

I.

 F the virgin saints whom God has honored, few have a stronger attraction for us than the little shepherdess Genevieve. She has no earthly greatness to recommend her. She did not lay down titles or wealth to serve God. She was born in poverty, and from her childhood had been accustomed to labor. But her innocence of life is what wins us to-day, just as it won the admiration of a saintly bishop in her own life-time.

The story runs that when Bishop Germanus and Bishop Lupus were on their way to the island of Great Britain in the year 429, they stayed awhile at a little town near Paris, called Nanterre. Both had in early life been lawyers. Both, when called to God's service, had entered upon it so generously and zealously, that when the Pelagian heresy was spreading over Great Britain, Saint Germanus was chosen by the Pope to oppose its progress, and the bishops of Gaul entreated Saint Lupus of Troyes, though at that time he had been only a few years a bishop, to accompany Germanus. No choice could have been better. The cour-

age and zeal of the bishops overcame all obstacles. They saved the people not only from foes who threatened their spiritual welfare, but also from those who interfered with their temporal prosperity.

While on their way to this scene of labor, the two bishops reached Nanterre ; it looks as if they had chosen by a special providence of God, this town as the end of their day's journey, for it was an insignificant place, and not likely to attract the attention of travellers, who could find much better lodgings at Paris, only four miles distant.

The news of their arrival spread quickly through the town, then came the report that they were waiting to see the people at the village church.

Ere long the peasantry came flocking to the church. Upon the steps they saw a group of three persons, only one of whom they knew. But from the respect which he, their pastor, displayed towards the other two, they readily concluded that the strangers were the bishops of Auxerre and of Troyes. The prelates stood for a few moments in silence, as if waiting till all had assembled. Then Germanus, robed in a rough tunic, his monk's cowl thrown back on his shoulders, moved a little apart from his two companions, and addressed the expectant congregation. As he spoke, how his soul seemed to glow with Divine love, how filled he was with the thought of the mission he was engaged upon, how grieved by the ravages which heresy had made in his Divine Lord's vineyard !

After the discourse he gave the people his blessing.

Then, we are told, the children were presented to him. We can picture to ourselves the good priest calling them

from the crowd and arranging them in order ; and next, the bishop descending to where they stood, and as he passed along their ranks, occasionally stopping to ask a bright little fellow his name, or put him some simple question about the life our Blessed Lord. With many a smile at the way in which his questions were answered, the bishop laid his hand upon the head of each child as he passed, and gave him an additional blessing. He had spoken with several in this way, when one of the children, a little girl, kneeling in her turn for his blessing, attracted his attention.

“ What is your name, my child ? ” he asked.

“ Genevieve,” she answered, looking up.

“ How old are you ? ”

“ Seven years old.”

“ And how do you spend your time ? ”

“ I tend my sheep all the day,” she said; then getting more confident from the bishop’s kindly manner, she went on:

“ Early in the morning I go out to the sheep-fold with my father, and he opens the door, because the bars are too heavy for me, and lets the sheep out.

“ Then I lead them through the fields where the grass is so wet that they have no need to drink. But when the dew is dried up, and some of them get thirsty, I drive them to the brook, and afterwards to the shady wood, because it is too hot to stay in the fields. In the afternoon I lead them to the brook again, and from there to the pastures either on the hill or in the meadow. And when it is getting dark, I drive them home to the fold, and my father takes care of them, for I cannot do so yet.”

“ And is the care of your sheep your first thought in the

morning, my child?" asked the bishop, who had listened to this outburst of the little one's confidence, with a feeling as simple-hearted as her own.

"Oh, no, Bishop," she answered, "first I say my prayers, and thank God for taking care of me during the night, and ask him to bless me during the day. Then I thank the Blessed Virgin, and my Guardian Angel, and ask them also to watch over me and to pray for me while I am tending my sheep; and at night I say my prayers again."

The smile that played about the bishop's lips while Genevieve was telling of her sheep, had now given place to a more serious, though not less attractive expression, and he asked once more,

"And do you never think of God before evening, my child? you have spoken only of the morning and evening."

"I often think of him during the day," she answered, "especially when my sheep are resting in the quiet wood. I pray to him then, and make crowns of wild flowers for my Blessed Mother, who is Queen of Heaven."

"And your Mother in Heaven will bless you, my child," said the bishop. Then after a pause, in which he seemed engaged in thought, he added,

"What is your father's name?"

"Severus," answered Genevieve.

"And your mother's?"

"Gerontia."

"Are they here?"

"Yes, Bishop, I was with them when the priest called us."

"Tell them to come and speak with me."

Genevieve hastened to where her father and mother were standing, witnesses of what had taken place. Seizing her father's hand, and looking up to her mother's face, she cried,

"The bishop wants to speak with both of you. Come and see him." And in her eagerness she tried, with her child's strength, to quicken her father's steps. For in his shepherd's dress, which plainly showed his poverty, he was so abashed at being honored by the bishop before all the people, that he went too slowly for the eager child. But the bishop's words and manner soon made him forget his poverty, and the people's presence.

"Severus," said the bishop, "guard well this child whom God has given you; angels rejoiced at her birth, because of the holiness that is to be hers; for she will perfectly accomplish the resolution she has already taken to serve God all her life. Yes, and she will lead others also to serve him."

Then turning to Genevieve,

"Tell me, my child, do you not desire to live forever a virgin, and to be the spouse of Jesus Christ?"

"Yes, Bishop," she replied, "I have long desired to give myself all to him, and now, through your favor, I ask leave to do so."

We have tried to picture this scene to our readers from the few hints given of it in the life of St. Genevieve. It is certain that the holy child expressed to the bishop the desire she had of consecrating herself to God's service, and that Germanus, after his interview with her parents, led her into the church, where during the whole time of the chanting of the Divine Office, he kept his hand upon her

head. Before dismissing her, he sent for her parents once more.

“Bring Genevieve to see me early in the morning,” he said; “I wish to speak with her again before I leave Nanterre.”

II.

THE people who had witnessed this unexpected scene, were filled with surprise at the distinction shown to the little child, whose parents they knew to be among the poorest of the whole country-side. The last words of the bishop tended to increase their surprise and curiosity. And so, on the following day, when Genevieve came again to see the bishop, many of them had gathered together, eager to witness the end. Germanus, motioning to her to come forward to where he sat among the priests and monks, welcomed her, and said,

“Genevieve, my daughter, do you remember the promise you made to God?”

“Yes, Bishop, and I will keep it with God’s help,” she answered.

Germanus gave her a small brass medal, on which a cross was cut.

“Wear this cross, my child; it will remind you of your promise, and of Him whose spouse you are. And let it be the only ornament you wear. Jewels do not become one who calls herself the spouse of the poor and suffering Jesus. Serve him faithfully, and do not be discouraged when you meet with contradiction. The service of God is not one of ease and comfort; yet God will give you comfort in his own best way if you will only be faithful to him.”

Genevieve promised, and knelt once more to receive the bishop's blessing, and then she returned home. In a few hours the departure of the two bishops restored to Nanterre the quiet look that it usually wore.

The following incident will serve to show more clearly what manner of man he was, whose insight into the future had enabled him to read so well the after-life of Genevieve.

While Germanus and Lupus were in Great Britain, the Saxons made a descent upon the island. The people raised an army to oppose the invaders and entreated the two bishops to accompany it. Saint Germanus had been a soldier in his day, and the victory he now won at the head of this little Christian army, proved that the holiness of his life had not made him forget his early training. He led the troops into a valley between two high mountains, and gave orders that when the moment came they were to repeat the battle-cry he should raise. As the Saxons approached, Germanus shouted the Alleluia three times; the army repeated his cry; then the mountains took it up. To the Saxons the echoes resounding from cliff to cliff, seemed the war-cry of an immense host, and instead of advancing to the attack, they fled in confusion from an unknown foe.

III.

THE attention which had been directed to Genevieve gradually died away. Those who might have expected to see some change in her conduct were disappointed. God had enriched her soul without men's knowledge. And when he chose to reveal the holiness of his favored child,

he had done so, not by her own lips, but by the words of Germanus. Still there was some change in her; but of a kind not easily to be remarked by the simple peasantry. Moreover, they had scarcely any opportunity to notice it, for she spent her days with her sheep, in places where her increased recollection and devotion had no earthly witness. She had learned to speak with God in the fields, and by the brook-side to which she used to lead her sheep. During the noonday heat, when she gathered them together beneath the shade of the old forest trees, she would kneel down a little way off and rest her eyes on the cross which Germanus had given her to remind her of her Heavenly Spouse.

But her most exquisite delight was to go and speak with God in the tabernacle where love had compelled him to dwell as a captive. Even if she had not made a promise to Germanus that she would always hear Mass on days of obligation, her heart of itself must have led her to the church. But the time was coming when her natural inclination and her fidelity to her promise were to be put to a severe test.

A tradition tells us that the well of Nanterre was blessed by Saint Genevieve. The following circumstances, briefly noticed in the record of her life, gave rise to the tradition.

It was the eve of a feast day, and Gerontia, our little Genevieve's mother, was making preparations to go next day to the village, which was some distance from their home. We can imagine Genevieve also making preparation, but in her own way; that is, weaving her little acts of virtue into a garland as an offering to God.

On the morning of the festival, however, Gerontia bade

the child remain at home. Genevieve appeared unwilling to remain. She entreated to be allowed to go and keep the feast, urging as an argument, her promise to Bishop Germanus.

Gerontia's hasty temper was not proof against what she considered the child's importunity.

"Did the bishop tell you to be disobedient?" she cried. "Did he teach you to think yourself equal to your mother, and to imagine that she cannot go to the village without your going too?"

"No, dear mother," answered Genevieve, "but he told me not to be absent from Mass on feast days, when God commanded me to go, and surely, to obey God is not disobedience."

"Who taught you to contradict, or to reason with your mother?" cried Gerontia, not noticing at all the humble and deferential manner of the child. "I'll teach you to do as you're bidden, if I never should be able to see the church of Nanterre myself. There, perhaps after that you'll learn how to answer next time."

And as she spoke, she struck the child on the face with her closed hand. But her anger vanished with the blow. A look of terror spread itself over her features. She stared wildly about, and called for Genevieve whom she had so rudely driven from her side. But though the child answered, and came and stood near, Gerontia could not see her. The curse she had dared to invoke had fallen upon her. She was blind.

Genevieve's anguish was equal to her mother's. For the first few minutes the poor child would not believe that her mother was unable to see.

"Mother," she cried imploringly, "don't be blind! You did not mean to strike me so hard, and I do not feel it now, mother. Look! here I am! You can see me now, can't you, mother?"

"Lead me to the light, Genevieve," answered her mother, "and then perhaps I shall be able to see."

The child took her mother's hand, and led her to the window, looking up into her face at every step, to see if sight were not returning to take the place of that cold stare.

"Look, mother, look! Don't you see my father coming back from the sheepfold to go"—Genevieve stopped speaking, lest the mention of going to Mass should increase her mother's anguish.

"Why do you stop speaking, child? He is going to Mass! Oh, Genevieve, if I had let you go to Mass, this would not have happened to me!"

"What has happened to you?" asked Severus, entering in time to catch these last words.

Gerontia could not answer.

"What is the matter, Genevieve?" asked Severus again, as he noticed the child's tears.

"My poor mamma cannot see," she answered, bursting into tears once more.

Then Gerontia herself in a faltering voice confessed the ill-treatment she had used towards Genevieve, and told how the punishment had followed it. Severus did as Genevieve had already done. He urged his wife to try and see, assuring her that her loss of sight was only momentary. But it was all in vain that she tried. That day passed, and the next day; and father and child were obliged to acknowledge to themselves that Gerontia was really blind.

Genevieve had to labor now more than ever. All the household duties fell to her share, and in addition she had to care for every want, and guide every movement of her mother, who was almost helpless by reason of her sudden blindness. But Gerontia was growing more patient in her suffering, as day by day she felt all the tenderness of her generous child.

Though all remedies had failed to restore Gerontia's sight, Genevieve did not give up hope; but while striving with a child's love and ingenuity to lessen her mother's suffering, she never ceased to pray for her recovery. In the early morning, and at night, when tired with work, she begged of God that the darkness might be removed from her mother's eyes. During the day, when too busy to utter long prayers, her heart sent forth aspirations that needed few words to make them understood, nay, that often were not expressed in words at all, but found their sole utterance in her heart.

We shall see how her faith was rewarded.

The little girl had gone one day to draw water from the well, and, being more tired than usual, had sat down to rest, and was thinking of how she had been the occasion of her mother's blindness. Then remembering the visit of Germanus, she thought to herself,

"Our Lord will grant me anything I ask of him, because I am his spouse. But then," she reflected, "I have been asking him to cure my mother, and she is still blind."

Then after a moment's pause, "I know," she cried; "I did not ask confidently enough; or perhaps our Lord wanted to see if I would continue asking. Now I am going to

ask very confidently because I know he can give me what I desire so much."

And as she prayed, she felt sure that this time her petition was answered: so sure, that when she carried the bucket of water back to the house, and, raising it before her with both hands, tottered over the doorstep, she looked anxiously at her mother to see if some change had not already taken place.

"Is that Genevieve?" asked her mother, at the sound of the little one's footsteps.

"Yes, mother," said Genevieve; "have I been long away?"

"It seemed long to me," said Gerontia, "because I have been anxiously waiting for you to come back. I have been thinking while you were gone that God will restore, and soon, too, the sight which he has taken away from me. Come here, my child, and bring some of the water from the well."

Genevieve obeyed, and her mother, taking the pail of water, desired the child to bless it. Again Genevieve obeyed, though wondering what could be the object of such a request. Gerontia raised her face to heaven for a moment and uttered a fervent prayer. Then she bathed her eyes two or three times in the water, and turned her face upon Genevieve. The child leaped for joy; her mother's look was no longer vacant! her eyes were full of light; she could see! Genevieve's prayer had at length been answered.

IV.

GENEVIEVE met with no further opposition to her pious desires. Gerontia having been taught to reverence the child through whose means God had worked so wonderful a cure, encouraged her holy inclinations.

At the age of fifteen years Genevieve was presented to the Bishop of Paris, or of Chartres, as some say, to receive the religious veil. In company with her were two other young girls who had the same desire of consecrating themselves to God. She, being the youngest of the three, was placed last; for it seems to have been the custom, when several were to take the veil at the same time, that the oldest in years should first make the act of consecration, though in our days the vows of religion are made first by the novice whose term of probation has been the first to expire. The usual order, however, was not to be observed on this occasion. The bishop, looking earnestly at Genevieve, directed that she should be presented first because God had already sanctified her. Whether it was that her promise to Germanus had been revealed to the bishop, or that he himself, like Germanus, saw in her modest bearing the seal of close communion with God, has not been ascertained; this much, however, is certain, that by this incident additional and most unexpected testimony was offered to her sanctity.

It was not the custom in those days, as it is now, for virgins consecrated to God to leave their homes, and follow the religious life in the quiet of the cloister. So Genevieve still remained at Nanterre with her parents. But her manner of life underwent a great change. She was now solemnly consecrated to God. The world had seen the consecration, and had a right to look for outward evidence of that holiness which had been discovered by Germanus, and honored by the bishop of Paris. And Genevieve did give evidence of it; not to please the world, not caring for, nor thinking of, the world's opinion; but because she had now become the

accepted spouse of Him whom she had chosen in her childhood.

Her fasts were so rigorous that we of this day would hardly think them possible, if they were not well authenticated. Her food was barley bread and a few beans prepared in oil; and for weeks together she would not eat on any day except Sunday and Thursday. This scanty diet she continued for upwards of thirty years, until certain bishops of Gaul who knew her virtue, commanded her to moderate her austerities. And it is no slight proof of the Saint's holiness that after fifty years spent in God's service she cheerfully laid aside her own will, and out of obedience, made use of a richer diet.

When she was between her fifteenth and twentieth year, her father and mother both died, and she went to live with her godmother in Paris. Now there lay before her a new field in the regions of holiness, a field almost unknown to her as yet, but destined to be the scene of heroic virtue on her part as it has been on the part of other saints and devoted souls in all ages,—the field of charitable works for her neighbor. Genevieve was not slow in entering upon this new employment. Not Paris alone, with its numbers of poor and suffering, but other cities also were to experience the effects of her charity.

To assist the unfortunate by relieving their bodily wants, to animate timid hearts to have hope and confidence in God, to console the sick, to watch by the bedside of the dying,—these are works for which there is always an opportunity, and to the saints such opportunities are too precious to be lost.

Not seldom the cure of the sick, who were placed under

her care, the relief of the needy, the conversion of the dying sinner, had to be attributed to more than human power. The marvels wrought under her hand, and the fulfilment of the predictions which she made, extended her fame throughout Gaul, and made her a welcome guest in the cities which she was led to visit in the cause of charity.

Few, if any, of the saints whose lives have been spent before the world's gaze, have been able to escape the world's censure, or avoid its persecution. In their case, contact with the world has been, not so much a source of danger, as a means of sanctification. The vexations to which it has subjected them, the suffering it has caused them, have only served to bring into relief virtues which otherwise might have remained unknown. Genevieve's lot did not differ from the portion of by far the greater number of God's servants. Some persons began to have doubts of her sanctity; to insinuate that it was not real; and finally to declare her to be an impostor. She had performed miracles and uttered prophecies. But when the popular veneration for her began to give way to distrust, her very miracles and predictions were made use of to increase the prejudice that had now begun to be entertained against her.

It was hard that she should meet with contempt even from people whose opinion she valued not; it was still harder to hear herself decried by some whom she had perhaps assisted; but how much more disappointing and disheartening it must have been when she saw the erroneous opinions gain such ground as to deceive persons whose hearts, like her own, were devoted to God; from whom a word of encouragement would have been so welcome, if only it had come ! Thirteen

years before, among a crowd of happy children she had been pointed out as a child favored of God, and destined to grow in grace before him, and lead others to his service. Now a whole city united in declaring her hateful to God, guilty having put on the garb of holiness, without being holy ; of having prophesied and performed prodigies, not by power derived from God, but from the evil spirits.

Genevieve uttered no complaint, but waited for God to vindicate her in his own good time.

About this period Germanus was on his way back from Britain, and on reaching Paris, he immediately inquired for Genevieve. Her enemies (and few indeed there were in those days who could be called her friends,) did not hesitate to utter their calumnies to the bishop, and endeavor to gain him to their side. But what they meant to be directed against her, says an ancient chronicle, only served to increase her praise. Germanus saw through their purposes, and paid no attention to their false representations; but conducting them to the house occupied by Genevieve, showed them the ground wet with her tears, told them of her early life, and of the intimation he had received of her sanctity; and by the honor he paid to her, gave open reproof to her calumniators.

The authority of Germanus was sufficient to appease the storm that had been raised against Genevieve. But the calm did not last long. Germanus set out for Italy, and when the influence of his presence was once removed, the storm returned with more violence than ever.

V.

BEFORE giving an account of this new persecution, it will be well to notice a custom prevalent at this time, which was continued from the days of the early Christians down to the period when Genevieve lived, and is not altogether out of use in our own time. We all know what the *agapæ*, or feasts of charity, were among the Christians of the first ages. At these feasts there was no distinction of rank observed; rich and poor sat side by side, and partook of the same fare; and, what was best of all, refreshed their souls with the food of holy conversation. In the time of Saint Genevieve however, only a relic of the *agapæ* remained; bread, blessed and distributed to the people, taking the place of the feasts, and the name “*agapæ*” giving way to that of “eulogies.” The eulogies were distributed to the faithful without distinction of rank, and it is probable that the distribution took place, for the most part in the church.

Few particulars of the second persecution of Genevieve have come down to us; but those we have, enable us to piece out the details of a scene not often witnessed among a Christian people. A violent prejudice against the Saint had once more spread throughout the city, and people talked of her in no kindly spirit, calling her an impostor, a hypocrite. One day as she was passing a knot of idlers, some one muttered, “There goes the witch.” Then a reckless voice cried out, “Let’s drown her in the Seine!”

In the thoughtless crowd this cruel cry found other voices to echo it, and soon the street resounded with the shouts.

“Stone her!”

“Drown the witch!”

“Let us seize the hypocrite! Away with her! Away with the hypocrite!”

And the crowd, having lashed themselves into fury, started in pursuit of their victim. It was not difficult to overtake her. She made no resistance to the fate that stared her in the face, but amid the shouting of the mob, kept her thoughts fixed on God and begged him not to abandon her. The crowd went on increasing, and soon her ears were filled with such shouts as these uttered on every side,

“To the Seine with her! She richly deserves to be drowned for her counterfeit piety!”

She did not try to reason with the brutal men who were hurrying her along.

But if she spoke not for herself, there was one at hand who would speak. On a sudden, a voice was heard on the outskirts of the crowd.

“Out upon you, for knaves that you are! Make way, and let me pass!”

Again the cries broke forth more fiercely than before,

“Away with her! Let no one dare to interfere!”

“What!” said he who had provoked this outburst, and who was now making his way through the crowd, “What! will you presume to resist the authority of Germanus!”

At the name of Germanus the mob grew calmer.

“I bear a message from Germanus to the holy virgin Genevieve. Make way and let me pass!”

The crowd divided to give room to the messenger, who was no less a personage than the Archdeacon of Germanus; and he, quickly going up to Genevieve, presented the eulogies which his master had sent her in token of esteem.

At this sight a feeling of veneration for the saintly woman whom they had injured, spread throughout the populace. Genevieve was never after subjected to persecution, and during the remainder of her life she possessed the people's esteem and confidence.

Her rescue from the mob occurred about the year 449, twenty years after her first interview with Germanus. Some time afterwards, in 451, Paris was thrown into great alarm by the report that the Huns under their king, Attila, were approaching the city. So great was the terror caused by the very name of Attila, that the citizens prepared to abandon their homes rather than expose themselves to the barbarian's cruelty by an attempt at resistance.

Now was the time for courage, courage great enough not only to make a stand against Attila and his countless savage hordes, but also to oppose the will of the people, who in their present state of panic might use no gentle measures towards any one who should attempt to dissuade them from flight. The needed courage was found in a woman's heart.

Genevieve stood forth to oppose the desertion of Paris. She assembled the women in the baptistery of Saint John-le-rond, to fast and pray for the town's deliverance. She went through all parts of the city, rousing the courage of the men, and urging them to stand and defend themselves. Some laughed at her. And certainly it was a strange thing that no one but a woman could be found to urge men to fight for their homes.

But Genevieve was not discouraged. Day after day she continued her work, sometimes animating the faith of the

women, sometimes encouraging the men in their preparations for defence, always assuring them of the protection of heaven. Her courage did not spring from rashness or from ignorance of Attila's power. She did everything possible to defend the city, and confided in God and expected help from Him in cases where her preparations were insufficient. God answered her desire, and ratified the assurances she had given to the people. The king of the Huns, when within a day's march of Paris, suddenly turned aside and led his forces toward Orleans where he met with a check which stayed, for a time at least, his career of devastation.

Attila's march through Gaul was the occasion of another illustrious exhibition of Christian courage, an account of which may not prove uninteresting, since its hero, Saint Lupus, is already known to us as the associate of Germanus at the time when little Genevieve first made known her purpose of consecrating herself to God.

Attila had plundered several cities, and, on every occasion, had exhibited great ferocity, especially after the siege of Metz, on account of the resistance offered by that place. On taking the town he burned it, and carried into captivity the bishop and all the citizens who had escaped from slaughter. He next approached Troyes, where Saint Lupus was engaged in watching over the temporal as well as the spiritual welfare of his people. The holy bishop had now a fiercer enemy to meet than when by the side of Germanus in Britain, years before, he had faced the Saxon pirates.

But the cause was the same,—God's flock was to be defended and the defence belonged to its bishop. He

prepared himself for the task by prayer, fasting and good works. As Attila approached, Lupus, arrayed in pontifical robes, went forth to meet him. The bishop's fearless words together with the haughty reply of the barbarian king have been handed down to us.

“Who art thou,” asked Lupus, “that dost overcome so many kings and nations, dost ruin so many cities, and dost subdue the world?”

Attila replied,

“I am King of the Huns, the Scourge of God.”

“If thou art the Scourge of God,” returned the bishop, “remember to do only what is allowed thee by the hand that moves and governs thee.”

Such boldness astounded Attila.—And there was a majesty in the bishop's tone and look that awed the proud barbarian.

Attila promised not to harm the city, and Troyes, uninjured, saw him pass through her streets on his way to devastation in other fields.

We will be pardoned this digression for the lesson it contains. Within a single view we see the courage of Lupus and the heroism of Genevieve, and we have, moreover, a refutation of a sentiment, prevalent in our own time, whose plain expression would be that “piety is found only in weak or timid hearts.”

VI.

WHEN it became known that Attila did not intend to attack Paris, Genevieve retired from public view. She was not, however, to lead a solitary life. Her example had already

drawn others to consecrate themselves to God. And thus was being fulfilled the prophecy Germanus had made when he said to Severus that his daughter would not only be a saint herself, but would draw others to the service of God.

Genevieve was accustomed, in company with other virgin servants of God who were desirous of learning the science of holiness under her guidance, to make pilgrimages to different shrines of devotion, especially to that of Saint Denis, whose tomb was at Mont-Martre, outside of Paris. One Saturday evening they set out for this shrine, intending, according to their custom, to spend the night there in prayer and fasting. But the night was stormy, and the darkness and rain made travelling very difficult over ill-kept roads, which were rough even in good weather. They journeyed on, however, guided by the flame of a torch carried at their head; but owing to the wind, this was an uncertain light, and to most of them was of little use except that it served to animate their courage by telling them that those in advance were still making some progress, and that the party was keeping together. But even this uncertain guide failed them at last, as a fierce gust of wind swept across the road and extinguished the torch. Dismay for a moment seized the company of timid pilgrims. Then the sweet, calm voice of Genevieve was heard through the darkness,

“Do not fear, I will take the torch and lead you.”

No sooner had she taken the torch into her hand than it lighted of itself, and the pilgrims reached the tomb of Saint Denis in safety. On account of this miracle, Genevieve is sometimes represented in art as holding in her hand an extinguished torch, which an angel is in the act of re-lighting.

Out of devotion to Saint Denis, she determined to build a church in his honor. He and his companions had been the apostles of the country, and she was anxious to foster a spirit of devotion to them among the people; and thus procure for France the special protection of those who had labored to convert it.

When she looked about for means to carry her project into execution, several difficulties arose. In the first place, it was objected that no lime could be obtained, as there was no way of burning it. She directed those who made this objection to cross over the city bridge, and bring her word of what they should hear. On their return, they related that they had overheard a conversation of some men who were tending swine, from which they had discovered the position of two lime-kilns used in former days by the Romans, but now forgotten. This chief difficulty removed, the work was begun, and the church was erected. Under king Dagobert I., in the year 629, it was rebuilt, and a monastery was added to it.

VII.

By the holiness of her life and the fruits which her example produced, Genevieve was assisting Paris in peace as she had assisted it in war. But she was destined to be the protectress of the city once more, and thus to confirm her right to the title of Patroness of Paris. Gaul had been delivered from the Huns. It was now overrun by the Franks. After crushing every force that dared to oppose them, they marched on Paris. The city was stoutly defended; and Childeric, king of the Franks, was obliged to turn the siege

into a blockade, which lasted ten years. During this time the people were reduced to a state of extreme suffering. The whole country in the vicinity of the fortifications was in possession of the Franks; in consequence of this, no provisions could be obtained, and famine stalked from house to house within the city walls. Genevieve for a long time was able to assist many of those in distress. But the number who applied to her became so great, that she could not aid them all. Still she went about among the sick, helping them in every way she could. At length she determined to form an expedition to go down the Seine and convoy provisions into Paris from the neighboring towns. Boats were necessary; and she must find generous hearts like her own, willing to undertake the perilous adventure. She relied, however, on the courage of the boatmen to enable her to meet this difficulty. Some of these, however, not possessing the same high spirit as herself, looked more closely at the danger of the undertaking, and strongly urged their objections to it.

"Of what use," one said, "will it be to leave the city? As soon as we get outside, there are the Franks, and we cannot escape unobserved."

"We shall die of hunger, it is true, if we stay here; but we may as well do that," another objected, "as die by the hands of the enemy."

"And even if we do pass safely up the river," argued a third, "they will hear of us, and will lie in wait for us, as we come down. And, with our boats loaded, how can we escape? All our supplies will go the Franks, and as for ourselves, once they lay hands on us, they'll make us sing for our pains!"

Genevieve knew the force of these objections, she knew the danger to which she was inviting the men, and exposing herself. But she did not waver, and from the result, we may easily conjecture the nature of her reply. Pausing a moment after the men had ceased speaking, she calmly answered their objections. She did not accuse them of cowardice, but inspired them with courage:

“It is not to give you into the hands of the Franks,” she said, “that I have asked you to undertake the relief of the city. I know well the risk you run. But I promise you that we shall not suffer from the enemy, either on our way up the river or when we return. Consider that it is not for yourselves only but for the men and women and children who are dying every day that I ask you to undertake this enterprise. In God’s name, run this risk for the city’s sake. And, after all, it is not a risk, for heaven will watch over us.”

A few of the boatmen at once sprang forward to accompany her, and when the others saw the boat push off from the shore they leaped into the remaining vessels, and the little fleet set off. The people on the wharves watched it until it had disappeared, and even then they lingered on as if unwilling to leave the scene.

No tidings of the boats reached the city, until, on the third day, the news was shouted from the watch-tower that the expedition was in sight far up the stream. The crowd at the river-side strained forward, anxious to catch the first glimpse of Genevieve, and cheer upon cheer arose as the boats came in view.

Genevieve’s promise had been fulfilled. God’s help had

not been wanting to the gallant little band in their perilous enterprise. They had succeeded in eluding the Frankish posts, had passed the obstructions in the river, and from the towns along its banks had procured a full supply of provisions.

VIII.

NOTWITHSTANDING this relief the city was obliged to submit, after having held out for ten years. When the surrender had taken place, Genevieve sought an interview with Childeric, to intercede for her people. The Frankish king received her kindly, out of admiration for the courage which enabled one who had worked so earnestly against him to come fearlessly into his presence.

"I have come," she said, "to ask mercy for the people whom your arms have conquered."

Childeric, to try her courage, made answer:

"What! do you presume to speak of mercy towards men who have so obstinately resisted my arms? you especially, who have aided and encouraged them in their resistance?"

"Sire," replied the heroine, "they were fighting for their homes. The same compassion that then moved me to assist them, and to brave your wrath in doing so, now urges me to come before you and plead for them!"

Childeric, pleased with the noble answer, granted her easy terms. And although he could never be induced to profess Christianity, he continued to show great respect for Saint Genevieve to the end of his life.

It was not only on the occasion of the capture of Paris

that prisoners of war owed their lives to Genevieve. Childeric, some time after this, had ordered the execution of a number of prisoners outside the town. Fearing that Genevieve might come to him when she heard of what was going on, and, by her pleading, win him over to grant the prisoners their lives, he rode out from the city, and ordered the gates to be closed, so as to prevent her from overtaking him. Childeric was right in his surmise. Genevieve, when the news of the intended massacre reached her, sought an audience with the king, and on hearing that he had ridden out of the city, she followed him at once. On coming to the gates and finding them shut, she pressed her hand against them and they flew open of themselves. She overtook the king and obtained pardon for the men who were to die.

IX.

Thus did the little shepherd-girl, who had looked for no other reward than heaven's approbation, receive honor upon earth, where she sought it not. Thus, all through her life, God manifested her holiness, by the power which he gave her among the people, and among the rulers of the people. And all this time her humility became more and more apparent, as more and more honors were heaped upon her. Notwithstanding the veneration shown her, she never dared to think more highly of herself than she did in the days when, after Germanus' visit, she went back to her sheep on the hills about her native town. She knew that it is not wealth, or noble birth, or earthly honors that God looks for in the soul, and that the poor and simple-hearted are more

pleasing in his sight than those who are great in the world's esteem and in their own.

The honor she received upon earth, founded, as it was, on the holiness of her life, and the favors she received from God, was increased after her death, through the miracles wrought at her tomb. An account of one of these miracles may fittingly close this little sketch of her life, showing, as it does, that her old love for her people, and her charity towards the suffering, were still undiminished, even though six hundred years had gone by since her death.

Genevieve died in the year 512. In 1129, a disease known as the fever Des Ardents, or the Burning Fever, broke out in Paris, and despite the efforts of the physicians, gained such headway that in a short time it had numbered no less than fourteen thousand victims. The prayers and fasting of the clergy and people proved unavailing to avert the scourge. The city was to owe its deliverance to its dear Saint, to the Patroness of Paris.

The remains of Saint Genevieve were carried to the cathedral with much ceremony, and during the procession a great number of the fever-stricken were healed by simply touching the chest enclosing the relics. But Genevieve, in her life time, had been accustomed to seek out the suffering; and she would not do otherwise now that so many were lying sick, unable to catch even a sight of the procession. Her compassionate charity was felt throughout every quarter of the city that she loved; the fever did not spread any farther and of all who were then infected, only three died.

In commemoration of this miracle a festival, to be annually celebrated on the 26th of November, was instituted

by Pope Innocent II., after a careful examination of the facts. This festival is still kept in Paris. And to this day, through the changes of centuries the people of Paris are accustomed in any calamity to visit the shrine of their glorious Patroness, to honor her memory and implore her aid.


When we see these honors increasing through the long ages that have passed by since her death, and think of her, now as the simple child tending her sheep at Nanterre, then as the virginal Spouse of Christ, devoting herself to God's special service, afterwards as the great citizen, the woman-patriot, receiving homage from a powerful nation, and finally as the saint, venerated by the whole Christian world, we cannot help recalling the words of David:

“To me, O God, thy friends are made exceedingly honorable!”



SAINT MARTINA.

I.

NE quarter of the third century had just passed by. Alexander Severus was Emperor of Rome. When only sixteen years old he had been intrusted with the government of the empire; and at the time of our story had just begun the fourth year of a reign which hitherto had been a happy one for all his subjects, but especially for the Christians. Under the good influence of his mother, Mammæa, Severus had put a stop to the persecution of the faithful; and it was no longer necessary for them to steal out in the dead of night and pick their way through lone and narrow streets to the catacombs, when they wished to be present at the sacred mysteries. Even in Rome itself the Christians had now public places where they could assemble to offer their prayers to God. But a change had come. The edict of proscription against Christ's little flock was once more seen posted on the walls of the Forum. Soldiers were keeping guard before all houses suspected of being places where the Christians might assemble to give honor to God. A statue

of Apollo with a pan of incense before it, erected in the neighborhood of each of these localities, meant that all who were suspected must either sacrifice to the pagan divinity or suffer death.

The thought of martyrdom had almost fled from the hearts of many of the Christians under the late peace they had enjoyed. But there were others, the chosen champions, so to speak, of our divine Lord, whose imagination could frame no pleasanter picture than the flames crackling about their bodies at the stake, or the famished lion rushing upon them in the amphitheatre. Saint Martina, whose martyrdom is the subject of this little sketch, was one of these.

Martina was born in Rome of parents distinguished for their nobility, her father having been three times consul; and at this time the city did not contain within its walls a person more honored than Lady Martina. The Christians venerated her for her virtues, and the office of Deaconess which she held in the church; those who were not of the Faith esteemed her for her high rank and distinguished manners; the poor loved her, and called her the good Lady Martina. And well might they call her so; for she fed them, and clothed them, and cared for them with the tenderness of a mother. Now it was the feeble old man bent down with age, who knocked at her palace gate; now it was the poor orphan who held out her little pinched hand for an alms. Every day they came, and every day they went away filled. Yet this was not enough for Lady Martina. As our dear Lord in the holy communion goes with the priest to those who on account of infirmity cannot

come to him, so she with her presence gladdened the homes of the poor, and comforted them with kind words, and helped them with open heart and hand. How sweet must have been to her ears the oft-repeated "God bless you," murmured by grateful lips! How sweet to her heart, the wan face smiling the thanks it could not speak! In works of charity Saint Martina found all her entertainment, and she took no delight in the shows of the amphitheatre nor in the luxurious banquets of her pagan friends:

But why did the noble and beautiful Lady Martina keep aloof from the pleasures of the great city? To the mind of the devout Catholic her motive is easy to understand: long since she had chosen our divine Lord for her spouse, and had sealed her choice by a vow of perpetual virginity. The holiness of her life soon made her ripe for heaven. The harvest of martyrs had begun. Many of God's beloved ones had already laid down their lives for our holy Faith during the persecution, and were now kneeling before the throne of God. Did they know that Lady Martina was soon to join them there?

II.

It was a frosty morning in November. The senators and great men of Rome, muffled up in their togas, were hurrying to the Forum; while many of the great city's poor held their usual route to the palace of Lady Martina. One by one with satchels hanging from their arms they advanced and knocked at the gate. Strange occurrence! their patroness came not. A thing like this had never happened before. The first rap, however gentle, had been enough, and the

bright face would appear. But now not a second nor a third could make their good Lady hear.

“Probably,” one said, “she has been suddenly called to visit one of her poor patients and will soon be back.”

“God grant that what you say may be true,” returned another, “but there is only too much reason to fear that she has been denounced and arrested as a Christian.”

Such indeed was the case, as suspected by the last speaker. Never again shall they see her eager face at the old palace gate; never again shall they receive the whitened loaves or the flask of oil from their dear Lady’s hands. Those hands are in manacles now. That morning, as Martina was returning home, doubtless from a visit to some of her pensioners, she passed by a place where the Christians had established a chapel, and, without paying any heed to the Emperor’s warning, had knelt down outside to pray. There she fervently asked that she might soon be permitted to look upon her dear Lord face to face. God was pleased to accept his daughter’s sacrifice of her life, and graciously heard her prayer. While she was still on her knees, she was observed by Vitalis, Bassus and Caius, officers most serviceable to the Emperor in the employment of ferreting out Christians and forcing them to comply with the edict of persecution. The next moment Lady Martina was taken into custody. “At last,” she thought, “I am a prisoner for the Faith,” and a thrill of joy pervaded her soul; for now she could entertain the hope that soon she would meet Jesus, her Betrothed, in wedding garments jewelled with her blood.

The three noblemen knew well who she was, and how dearly she was beloved by the Romans. Each, in turn,

strove with fair words to induce her to burn a few grains of incense before the statue of Apollo. They flattered her with references to her noble birth, and her rank in society; told her how the Emperor esteemed her; how, in truth, he loved her; how, too, all his love must needs be turned into aversion, if she were to spurn the gods whom he adored.

“My lords,” the Saint replied with downcast eyes, “your persuasion is in vain; take me to the Emperor, if it please you; but first one little favor I ask of you: kind leave to enter this sacred house before we go.”

After some demur, they acceded to her request. When her prayer was finished, she followed them to the imperial palace, full of strength and trusting in the Lord Christ, her Redeemer. He had shed his blood for her, and should she hesitate one moment to shed hers for him? The road to Calvary was pictured before her mind. She saw the blood-stained foot-prints of her loving Saviour; and along that same path she could trace the steps of many a virgin, who had followed in the way her Lord once traversed. She too would mark that sacred pathway with her blood. Such thoughts as these made her heedless of the gazing populace, who pointed at her, some in scorn, some in pity.

“Why not burn one little grain of incense to Apollo,” she heard some one say as she passed by, “and save your life?”

But Saint Martina argued otherwise, and bargained not for the life of a day, but for the life of eternity. Should she offend God? Should she put Barabbas before Christ Jesus? Should she prefer the pleasures of the world to the bliss of heaven?

III.

RUMOR, as active then as it is now, quickly spread the report of the noble Roman lady's arrest, and many a cheek grew pale at the news, and many an eye was dimmed with tears. The trial of a lady, one of the best and noblest in Rome, on the charge of being a Christian, had an attraction for people of every condition of life. Accordingly the palace and all the ways leading to it were soon occupied by a dense crowd. The talk among the throng was only on one subject, the noble rank and high character of the lady now standing before the Roman Cæsar under the charge of refusing to offer incense to Apollo.

"Lady Martina," said Severus, "it has been told to us, that you are a Christian. There must be some mistake; it cannot be that you despise the gods whom your ancestors adored. Come, prove the accusation false by offering sacrifice to Apollo."

"My Lord Emperor," she replied, "I may never stain my soul by such a deed. I am, in truth, a Christian; and this is the boast that is dearest to my heart."

"Renounce that name," rejoined Severus, "and I, as Emperor, and you, as Empress, shall rule the world together; your grace, your noble mind, your goodness, make you worthy of such a dignity."

At these words Martina raised her eyes, and fearlessly directed them upon the Emperor.

"My Lord, why tempt me thus in vain? Long ago, I chose my spouse; one whose kingdom is not of this world, but who reigns, the king of kings, eternally in heaven. Him alone I adore. To him, Lord Emperor, you should

bid me offer sacrifice, and entreat him to destroy the rule of Satan over men."

Severus seemed to be unable to fathom the meaning of her words. Thinking, however, that the Christian heroine did really intend to yield in some point or other, he gave instructions that she should be accompanied to the temple of Apollo, where he himself would be present as a witness to her recantation. She was accordingly conducted thither by some of the Emperor's attendants.

IV.

ON entering the edifice, the first object that met the Saint's gaze was a figure of Apollo, black with the smoke of incense. Here and there, near the huge statue, loitered a few persons; these were the ministers to the heathen deity. At the sight of the false god's image, Martina's eyes flashed with an indignation like that which drove the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem. In an instant her hand is raised, and makes the sign of the cross; her lips move and call down heaven's malediction upon the statue of the pagan god. The moment after, the city was in consternation. That little prayer uttered by the Christian maiden had been answered by an earthquake that shook every house in Rome, and made them totter to and fro, and threaten to fall and crush their inmates. Mothers caught up their little ones in their arms, and fled for safety to the open highways. On all sides, were heard cries of alarm. But at the temple, where Martina's prayer had been spoken a scene more terrible might be witnessed. The idol of Apollo lay at its base, shattered into a thousand

fragments, a part of the mock-god's temple was in ruins, and out from the heaps of fallen stones and timbers came the groans of pagan priests and soldiers. The earthquake shock still continued at intervals, and fear was on every countenance. The meek Confessor of the Faith stood alone and dauntless, strong in the might of the Most High. On seeing the Emperor take to flight, she had attempted to recall him: .

"Stay," she cried, "stay, great Cæsar, and help your God Apollo. See, he is shattered to pieces; have this rubbish gathered up, and show the priests what new idol they must now adore: or rather, since his priests are also destroyed, let Apollo himself first raise up his broken image, and then assist his servants."

The last word had scarcely passed her lips, when another wonder occurred. The prince of darkness, who for a long time had made that huge block of stone his dwelling-place, began in visible form to roll and writhe in the dust.

"Holy virgin, Martina," spoke the demon, "handmaid of the great God who is in heaven, thou who keepest his commandments, hast detected my deformity. Eight and ninety years have I and my fellows dwelt here. Daily did my faithful ministers bring many souls to me. But woe is me, for now at last I must get me hence; thy prayer hath dispossessed me of my old abode."

Then turning to the Emperor who had just come back to the scene: "Severus," shouted the foul spirit in a tone of rage and despair, "Severus, adversary of the Christians, thou hast found a holy soul; but by means of her thou hast only succeeded in driving me back into hell, and in bringing thy reign to a shameful end."

One loud shriek, and the demon was in the air, whither he was followed by thousands of straining eyes, until he was completely lost to view.

V.

THESE miracles were but the prelude to a glorious combat and a yet more glorious victory, whose song of triumph is still heard in the Catholic Church, where it will continue to ring for all eternity. Once more the Christian lady was standing before the haughty ruler of the world; this time not to be interrogated, not to be flattered, but to be tortured. Near by were seen eight stalwart soldiers, their brawny muscles glistening in the sunlight. They are making ready to force Martina to obey the Emperor's will, but the maiden's thoughts are so rapt in prayer that she is heedless of what is going on. She is asking strength of our Lord to confess his name with courage, and to suffer with patience for his sake.

When the soldiers were ready for their task some of them let their blows fall rapidly upon Saint Martina's cheeks; others tore her flesh with iron hooks. As the cruel work went on many faces among the spectators were averted in disgust; others were turned in supplication towards heaven. Not a few of those who witnessed the scene had been wont to hear words of comfort from Lady Martina's lips, and to receive bounty from her hands. They weep to see her suffer, they pray that God may give her strength to conquer. And their prayer was heard. The hardy soldiers at last had to desist from their brutal work and take time to breathe, from very exhaustion their arms hung helpless at their sides and refused to do further service.

A change now stole over the faces of the populace, the disgust hitherto manifested on the part of some was turned into astonishment, and among others joy took the place of tears. God had chosen to be wonderful in his Saint. Acts of thanksgiving ascended to the skies from the hearts of the Christians who were there. All eyes were turned towards the heroic girl. Little did they expect, after the hundreds of blows she had received, to find her as fair and strong and brave as she had been before the ordeal began. Not a scar, not a bruise, could be seen on the face of the martyr. Severus, too, was lost in wonder; but pride suffocated every generous sentiment rising in his heart. He would have spared the maiden, had he listened to his better nature; but revenge for the destruction of the statue of his pet god, for his wounded self-love, and for his having been baffled by a mere girl, determined him to empty every vial of his wrath upon her person.

“Strike and tear her!” he shouted from his seat to the executioners. The men hesitate. “Strike!” Severus vociferated again, “strike! or death shall be your punishment!”

“My Lord Emperor,” said one the soldiers speaking for his fellows, “we ask your majesty to give us a hearing. This noble Lady suffers not at all; like an anvil, she feels nothing. Instead of our injuring her, she buffets us, and we feel intolerable pain. If it please your majesty, we entreat you to command her to be taken out of our hands; we see men standing near her, and defending her, and—”

“Cowards!” interrupted Severus, “you see but phantoms excited by your fears.”

“No phantoms these, my Lord,” stoutly insisted the sol-

dier, "there are four men in great splendor hovering about her, who return upon us the blows we endeavor to inflict upon her. The true God is on her side, and he will not permit us to torment her."

The appeal of the soldiers had no effect on the Emperor, except to supply more fuel to his anger, which now burst forth in a new form upon Saint Martina. He ordered the soldiers straightway to take fragments of earthen-ware, and grate her face without mercy. The heroic maiden paid no heed to this new torture, but while the executioners were tearing her flesh with the potsherds, she fixed her eyes upon heaven. Her heart had already been directed to the throne of God, and was throbbing forth its fervent thanks to the most adorable Trinity for the graces hitherto conferred upon her, and asking for new strength to bear up against her coming sufferings. More than this, her heart was pleading for those who were tormenting her. Like the voice of many waters, broke the prayer of Saint Martina about the throne of the Most High. Like a thunderbolt, in response fell a voice from heaven upon the ears of the torturers. Prostrate they fell at the holy virgin's feet, and the voice spoke these words:

"Unless my servant, Martina, had interceded for you, I would have struck you dead long before this. But because I desire to destroy the enemy, and make you my servants, I have spared you. And you, my daughter, take courage, and do not fear; I am the God, whom you adore, and on whom you call. I will not forsake you, nor will I permit rebellious Satan to triumph over you."

The divine voice died away from the ears, but never from the souls, of those eight men. They were pagans at the

moment when they fell at the feet of the martyr; but when they rose up, they were Christians in heart and mind. They had followed the Roman eagles through many a field, they were now ready to suffer and die under the despised banner of Christ, the Saviour. A fairer sight was never seen, a happier victory was never won. On their knees the sun-burnt legionaries craved pardon of their maiden conqueror for the insults and sufferings which, under compulsion, they had inflicted upon her, and then giving themselves into her hands, they declared that they would worship no God but the God of Martina, and would acknowledge no leader but Christ.

Following up her victory, Martina encouraged the new-made Christians, holding out to them as their reward, the treasures of a life that should never end, a heavenly life, where they should enjoy God forever. Once again the happy converts made the place ring with a profession of their faith. It was their last public act, except the one which was soon to follow. Severus withdrew his attention for a while from Saint Martina, to wreak his vengeance on the new Christians. Such was his rage, that he gave them no time for trial, and sentence of death by decapitation was immediately passed upon them. The eight champions of the cross went to the block as bravely as ever they had stood by their companions in arms and faced the enemies of Rome. One by one their heads fell beneath the executioner's axe, and one by one their souls found rest forever in the bosom of God. Their happiness had come even before Martina's; she was reserved for other trials and other victories.

VI.

THE first day of the trial was over. Again the sun rose brightly, and again Lady Martina was led forth to the place of execution, where she was to meet far more painful torments than any she had yet endured. Severus was unrelenting. Head, heart and hand were now engaged in devising means to bend his victim to his will. Another band of executioners had been selected. Their instructions were not to use potsherds, but knives, well sharpened, and suited to their purpose. When the signal to begin their work was given, they stripped the martyr of her clothing, as our Blessed Lord had been stripped, and bound her hands, as his had been bound. Then they seized their knives and for a time slashed her tender flesh. The blessed martyr's face all the while appeared as white as snow, her body was so bright that the eyes of the spectators could scarcely bear to look upon it. From her wounds flowed, not blood, but a substance like milk, which exhaled a delicious odor. Martina seemed to be absorbed in prayer, when suddenly, in the midst of her contemplation, she was interrupted by the voice of Severus.

"This is sorcery. It is by the hateful art of magic, base Christian, that you perform such tricks as these."

"Not so, my Lord," replied the Saint, "Satan, whom I abominate, is the prince of all enchanters, he loves and assists none but shameless and impious people. How can one whom I detest assist me to do such things?"

"It is vain for you to deny it," rejoined the Emperor. "What I have seen, convinces me that you are nothing but a wretched sorceress."

“My Lord, do you not know that my God and Saviour Jesus Christ condemns to eternal torments all those who deal in sorcery? Permit me to warn you, my Lord, that you make yourself liable to punishment, since you must needs know that I overcome these tortures, not by magic and enchantment, but by the name of Christ.”

“What, dare you to threaten me with punishment! I will have you beaten to death.”

“May God give me grace to suffer bravely for his sake,” meekly rejoined Martina.

At the Emperor's command, strong cords were tied to her hands and feet, and her body was securely stretched on four stout stakes driven into the ground. Twelve soldiers in succession wearied themselves in beating her. And here again the executioners asked Severus to relieve them.

“For every blow,” they said, “we give the lady, a blow is returned upon us with iron bars, our own flesh and bones are in agony, as if they were burning in a hot fire.”

Among the spectators there happened to be a member of the imperial court named Eumenius, whose judgment was held in great esteem by the Emperor. Eumenius had convinced himself that the radiance which still enveloped the person of Lady Martina was nothing but the effect of Christian witchcraft. He was certain that he could strip this girl of her brightness and beauty by a little device which his ingenious brain had invented. Accordingly, he went secretly to Severus, and advised him to send Martina back to prison until the next morning. He recommended that plenty of lard should be had in readiness by the gaolers; confidently assuring the Emperor that this, if it were smeared over the

martyr's body, would beyond doubt break her magic charms. Severus in his distress was willing to receive any sort of advice, and accordingly he ordered Martina to be led away again, hoping that his wise counsellor's prediction would be fulfilled.

In the dark, narrow cell did any vision of her past life flit across Martina's imagination? Did she think of her quiet oratory, of the peaceful seclusion she had enjoyed in the gardens surrounding her mansion? Did the rapping of the poor at her palace gate again echo in her ears? Doubtless thoughts of heaven occupied her mind, and gave no place to fancies such as these. True, situated as she was now, she could see nothing overhead but the murky vault of her prison-house, but piercing through this with the eyes of faith, she could gaze far upward to the throne of God. Her soul was full of rapture at the thought that she had been deemed worthy to suffer for God's dear sake, and she gave expression to her feelings of joy in an outburst of praise and thanksgiving. Martina's song was so sweet, that it drew the angels down to her cell from their celestial home. There they united their voices with hers, and waves of heavenly music went softly rippling through the prison halls.

VII.

THE morning came, and brought fresh trials for Martina. Severus, more resolved than ever to force the martyr to renounce her faith, called for Liminius, a tribune, and commanded him to go to the prison with a few chosen men, and bring Lady Martina to his presence. "But see

first," added the Emperor, careful to follow the instructions of Eumenius, his adviser, "see that hot lard be poured over her body."

Liminius on nearing the prison caught the odor of a most delicious perfume. Distrusting his own senses, he turned to his companions, and asked them if they did not perceive some unusual fragrance. Yes, all the soldiers had noticed it, and each had formed his opinion concerning the occasion of it. Some supposed that the citizens, out of the great love they had for Lady Martina, had scattered spike-nard and other aromatical substances around the place, others wished to give the honor of it to the gods, who, they said, had chosen this means of showing themselves favorable to the good lady. How far they all fell short of the truth, we shall presently see.

When the band had arrived at the dungeon, the odor grew more and more fragrant, and when their chief, Liminius, opened the first gate, a heavenly light burst upon their eyes. But when the second door gave way beneath the tribune's touch, the brightness increased tenfold, and enveloped him and his followers in one great sheet of flame. This was too much for the nerves of Liminius, and he fell to the floor as if struck by lightning. Around his apparently lifeless form the legionaries crouched helpless with fear, and not daring to speak a word. After a little while, when it was found that the flame would do them no harm, the tribune rose, and staggered through the fiery maze, till he came to the third chamber, which was the cell of Lady Martina. The officer's trembling hand slowly unbarred the third gate. When this was opened it unfolded a vision of

heaven, as it seemed, to the eyes of the soldiers, who stood spell-bound upon the threshold.

Full before them, on a throne more than royal, and not made by earthly hands, reclined the holy confessor of Christ. A cohort of angels stood in close files about the martyr, whom, while she was yet on earth, they seemed to claim as one of themselves. Their armor was white as snow, and shot forth myriad beams of light. For some moments there was a solemn silence ; then Martina opened a golden book which she held in her hand and read aloud the words :

“ How great are thy works, O Lord; in thy wisdom thou hast disposed them all.”

Then, like a flash, the vision was gone ; and Liminius, making bolder, placed the maiden in the custody of his soldiers, and conducted her to the old scene of her suffering.

On her arrival, the Emperor, afraid of being put to shame if he should attempt to question her, without further remark bade the tribune and his company to lead their prisoner to the temple of Diana, and there make her offer incense before the statue of the goddess. As Lady Martina approached the heathen temple, the enemy of mankind recognized from afar the Saint whom he had encountered a few days before. Already he knew his doom was sealed, and in a voice filled with despair, he cried out,

“ Woe is me, O God of heaven ! Whither shall I fly from thy spirit ? Fire pursueth me from the four corners of the temple.”

Martina, on entering the heathen place of worship, went close up to the statue of Diana, and, as she had previously

done when brought before the image of Apollo, blessed herself with the sign of the cross. Once before the martyr's prayer had shaken the city to its foundations, now it opened the heavens. Lightning and thunder came flashing and rolling from the sky. In an instant the marble Diana was reduced to a heap of dust. The charred bodies of the pagan priests and worshippers covered the arena. The next moment a piercing cry was heard from Severus ; a bolt of lightning had torn away half of his imperial robe.

The prisoner was then delivered into the hands of an officer called Justinus, who had recourse to knives and iron hooks once more, in the attempt to break the firmness of the brave girl. Under this treatment, the martyr never ceased repeating :

“ O cross of Christ, help me, for in thee there is salvation ! ”

“ She received at this place,” the chronicle of her martyrdom tells us, “ not less than a hundred and eighteen wounds, which she did not so much as feel, the power of Christ aiding and comforting her.”

VIII.

THE fury of despair was now all that remained to the Emperor to uphold him in his efforts to make Martina yield. What a relief to his shame-burdened heart would it have been to gain even the slightest victory over this girl's unconquerable soul. Once before he had offered her half his empire, and now again he tendered her the same gift.

“ Martina,” he began, “ I love you. Would to the immortal gods, you were not a Christian ! ”

"Would to God," replied the heroine, "that your majesty would believe in Christ!"

"What!" rejoined the Emperor, "the Roman Augustus to become a member of that sect which men so hate and despise! Never!"

"And do you hope, my Lord, to be able to win me from my faith?" she said. "You cleave to your religion, though it is false. I cleave to mine, because it is true."

Without making a direct reply the Emperor rose to his feet, and solemnly raising his right hand to heaven, and looking straight at Martina,

"By the immortal gods," he protested, "I love you, Lady; one thing alone I ask of you"—

"My Lord Emperor, never can I consent to sacrifice to your false gods," interrupted the calm and resolute voice of the Saint.

"Lady Martina," he urged, "I do not require you to offer sacrifice. But for your own preservation, and for the satisfaction of the people, merely say, 'great is the god Jupiter,' and I will make you Empress of Rome, and heralds in every town and province of the empire shall proclaim you wife of Augustus."

The virginal spouse of the Lord Jesus serenely made answer: "Your majesty, I am most unworthy of what you have so graciously made proffer; but here in the presence of him who will one day judge all men, I do protest that I would rather give my body to the beasts to be devoured, and so live forever with my spouse Christ Jesus, than by listening to your promises, fall into an eternity of pain."

Frightful was the anger depicted on the face of the disdained and baffled Emperor:

“You prefer the lions then, fair maiden. Your wishes, we do assure you, shall be gratified. Soldiers, away with her to the lions !”

IX.

THE amphitheatre was crowded. The spectators, breathless with excitement, were looking down upon the arena, where Lady Martina was standing. A lion that had not been permitted to eat for three days, is let slip against the defenceless Christian. The famished beast catches sight of his prey, and bounds forward to seize it. The degenerate Roman spirit of those days found a base substitute for the old heroic courage, in the stimulus given by the sight of human blood shed upon the sands of the Colosseum. And now necks are stretched forward and chests are panting and eyes are straining to catch a glimpse of the lion's deadly spring ! But what marvel is this ? The savage beast has suddenly checked his career, he moves slowly forward till he reaches the martyr, he submissively crouches down, and licks her feet with his tongue. Then he returns to his lair.

“See, Lady,” cried Severus, astonished at the miracle, “see how Jupiter has preserved thee ! Humble thy haughty spirit and proclaim his power and goodness.”

“What !” answered Martina, “call Jove powerful ! call him powerful who could not save Apollo, call him powerful who could not rescue Diana, whom your fables call his child, from destruction ! How, in truth, can such a god save me ?”

Hitherto the multitude who had been watching with interest the progress of the Saint's martyrdom, had merely ad-

mired her heroism ; but now they applauded her. Her logic pleased them, and the immense amphitheatre, which had so often resounded with cries for blood, to-day rang with a new shout, a shout that made the Emperor shudder. From thousands of throats came the appeal for mercy. Then a voice made itself heard, as the uproar died away:

“Cæsar,” it pleaded, “set free the maiden by whom the statues of the gods are shivered into dust, set free the maiden by whose means the true God has manifested that the spirits who dwell in idols are workers of iniquity !”

The demand of the people was made in vain. That same night Lady Martina found herself once more in her prison cell.

X.

SEVERUS wished to make yet one other attempt to break the resolute spirit of the martyr. Cities, he reflected, that have long stood out against their besiegers, have finally surrendered, men who have been long unrelenting and inexorable, have been known to yield at last. Accordingly, Martina was once more arraigned in presence of her persecutor. The old forms of torture were again employed, but all was to no purpose. At last an immense fire was made, and the executioners thrust Martina into the flames, as they crackled and roared and leaped high into the air. To burn her? No, not a hair of her head is scorched ! Once more the elements came to her aid. The sky, till then serene, became suddenly overcast with heavy clouds. The winds blew fiercely against the blazing pile, and swept the flames away from Martina’s person, and drove

them against such of her persecutors as were standing by. In vain they attempted to escape, the fierce flames pursued, and caught them, and burnt them to ashes.

The Emperor was in dismay, but his proud spirit refused to submit to the evidence of the truth. "If I could only break her charm," said he to himself, "for surely it is by witchcraft that she does these wonders!" The thought suddenly occurred to him, that perhaps the enchantment might lie in her hair, and he gave orders that Martina's tresses should be cut off close to her head. But not thus could Christ's holy confessor be shorn of her strength, and of this Severus to his great chagrin soon became aware. When her hair had been cut off, Lady Martina was conducted to a temple of Jupiter, where she was securely locked in, the Emperor sealing the door with his own ring. Every day the tyrant, followed by a numerous train of priests, went to visit the temple, but he did not enter the quarter of the building where the Saint was imprisoned. From the outside he and his attendants could catch the sound of voices singing strains of heavenly music.

"Do you not hear them?" said the Emperor one morning to his priests, "do you not hear those voices? I would stake my empire that the gods have left Olympus, to reprove and instruct the obstinate Christian."

The priests, it is needless to say, agreed with the Emperor; and then and there Severus, in his joy, vowed to present a sacrifice to father Jove for his supposed favor.

Having fulfilled his vow, the Emperor went once more with solemn rites to the temple. Triumphant, or dreaming of a triumph, he opened the sanctuary. How different from

all that he had hoped for was the sight that met his eyes ! A vision like that which Liminius and his companions had seen, burst upon the Emperor and his retinue of priests. Lady Martina, beautiful beyond anything human, was seated on a throne, so magnificent, that it could have been made only by celestial hands. Heavenly warriors were guarding the maiden. There, too, when they had recovered from their astonishment, the pagans saw their great Jupiter shattered into pieces, as Apollo had previously been, on the occasion when Martina made the sign of the cross before his statue. The Emperor's passion could not be restrained; Apollo, Diana, Jupiter, all his darling gods had been destroyed by the prayer, or, as Severus preferred to call it, the witchcraft of Martina. He gave sentence on the spot, that the Christian should be decapitated. With that sentence the victorious Saint received the promise of heaven.

XI.

THE end is near at hand. Martina is now standing beside the block; a few moments more, and she shall give back her soul unsullied into the hand of its Creator.

“ Lord Jesus,” she murmured, “ my God and my Saviour, be merciful to me a sinner, and deign to receive me as thy bride.”

The martyr spoke no more. meekly she bent her head to receive the fatal blow, and thus give her last testimony to our holy faith. Another moment, and the soul of the noble daughter of the Catholic Church was winging its way to God. While the sacred blood was still trickling down the

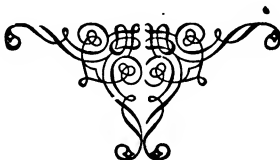
executioner's weapon, a voice from heaven, loud and clear, spoke to the martyr, and brought consolation to the hearts of the populace, who had been sorrowing over her whom they dearly loved.

"Martina," the voice said, "thou hast fought valiantly for my name, enter with all my saints into the kingdom of heaven, to-day thou shalt be with me in paradise."

A deep silence followed for a moment, then arose a pitiful cry. There, at the block, the executioners lay dead. Rome was again shaken by an earthquake, and to confirm the truth, that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church, two thousand and thirty souls were converted to the faith on that day.

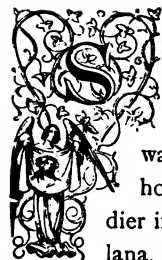
The rest of our Saint's story is soon told. For two days the martyr's sacred relics were permitted to remain just as they had fallen. On the third day a bishop named Ritorius was informed by a Christian who was lying in concealment near the scene of Martina's triumph, that her body had not yet received burial. The good Bishop at once accompanied his faithful informant to the place of the Saint's martyrdom. Two eagles were guarding the chaste remains, one at her head, the other at her feet. Quietly and reverently the Bishop and his companion bore the relics away. Long after, Pope Anterus had them brought into the city, and placed them in an ancient Church near the Mamertine prison at the foot of the Capitoline hill. Here they remained unknown till the year 1634, when they were discovered together with the bodies of Concordius, Epiphanius and their companions, by Pope Urban VIII. Under the reign of this Pope, the old church was rebuilt, and the relics of Martina

the glorious Virgin now repose in one of the most magnificent churches in Rome. By order of Pope Urban, her festival is kept on the thirtieth of January, though her martyrdom took place on the first of that month. To-day Saint Martina is honored as one of the special patrons of Rome.



SAINT CLARA.

I.



SAINT CLARA was born in Assisi, a city of the province of Umbria, in Italy, in the year 1193. Her father, Sir Favorino, who was descended from the ancient and powerful house of the Scifi, had won distinction as a soldier in the wars of his time. Her mother, Hortulana, a daughter of the Fiumi, was a lady not less illustrious for her piety, than for her noble birth.

A few days before Clara was born, her mother had felt depressed and anxious, but having had recourse to God in prayer, she was sensibly consoled and fortified, and she heard a sweet voice which spoke to her these words of comfort :

“Fear not ; for thou shalt bring forth a light which shall illumine the whole world with its splendor.”

When her child was born Hortulana gave her the name of Clara, that is, the bright one, fully believing that the voice which had encouraged and strengthened her in the hour of need, would prove to have spoken true. Her confidence was not misplaced.

From her very childhood Clara gave indications of her future sanctity. Artlessness, the special charm of little children, was pre-eminently hers. The future Abbess had been told of some of the practices made use of by the ancient monks, and, in imitation of them, she would count her prayers on little pebbles, which she held in her lap. She showed great love for the poor, to some of whom she gave every day means sufficient for their support. The child felt regret when obliged by obedience to her parents' wishes to wear costly dresses; yet she never showed any reluctance to fulfil their desires in this regard, however much they might be opposed to her own inclinations.

Though Clara was naturally of a lively disposition, her gayety was always tempered with a modesty that repulsed any unbecoming behavior. Very few years had elapsed from the time when she first began to know how good and gracious God is, before the saintly maiden resolved to lead a life of perpetual virginity. Later on, when the young girl had bloomed into womanhood, and according to the wishes of her parents, was taking part in the gayeties of the world, few who met her in society could imagine that the brilliant daughter of Sir Favorino Scifi wore beneath her rich dresses a tunic of bristles, which served to keep her in mind of the offering she had made to God.

Clara possessed every accomplishment which could make a young lady an object of admiration to the cavaliers of Assisi, and the other youthful noblemen of her father's acquaintance; in consequence there were many suitors for her hand. While she was still quite young, her parents had spoken to her of their intention of providing for her an early settlement in

marriage ; but she for her own part shuddered at the thought of taking a step which would forever separate her from the dearest joy of her heart.

In her prayers, which she now poured forth more earnestly than ever, she besought her Heavenly Spouse to remain faithful to her. Had he not accepted her as his betrothed ? Would he not guard her from the terrible danger which now rose in her path ? The soul of the saintly virgin was filled with fear ; but her prayers for this very reason were all the more earnest, and finally they so prevailed with God that he was graciously pleased to change the views of her parents with regard to her early marriage.

II.

CLARA'S eighteenth year marks the turning point in her life. There lived at this time in Assisi a holy man who was spreading far and wide the fire that consumed his own heart with love of God. This was the great Saint Francis of Assisi. Clara had the good fortune to meet him. The Saint spoke to her of the love God has for a virgin heart, and urged her to consecrate herself wholly to his divine service. Although these were only the self-same thoughts which her soul had cherished for years, yet the holy man's conversation made so deep an impression on her, that she returned home from her interview with Francis, determined, more than ever, to place her delight in God alone. Taking Saint Francis for the guide of her soul, she willingly submitted her entire conduct to his direction. She was to see him again on Palm Sunday, a few weeks after their last

meeting, when he would inform her of the time when the longing of her heart would be gratified, and her espousals with the Heavenly Bridegroom should take place.

Palm Sunday, the day appointed for her interview with Saint Francis, had come, and having put on her richest dress and most precious jewels, Clara accompanied her parents to the cathedral church of the city, to be present at the divine service. While all the rest of the family were kneeling at the altar-rail to receive the blessed palm, Clara was missed from their number, and the bishop, on looking round the church, saw her still occupying her seat. Timidity had prevented her from going up to the altar-rail with the others. The bishop, taking some of the palm, went down the church to where Clara was seated and gave it into her hand. This was the first mark of distinction shown to the holy maiden. In days to come she would be honored with visits from prelates holding the highest dignities in the Church, and the Pope himself would turn aside from his journey for the purpose of testifying his veneration for her virtues.

For some days, Clara's thoughts had been employed in meditating upon the events commemorated by Palm Sunday. During the course of her reflections on the triumphant entry of our Lord into Jerusalem, on the subsequent faithless conduct of the Jews, and on the infinite love of God for man, as displayed in the passion of our Divine Saviour, the holy virgin was so struck by the deceitfulness of the things of earth, and the true value of the things of heaven, that every moment seemed to her a year, until the ties were snapped that bound her to the world. Her suspense did not last long,

for during the conversation she had with Saint Francis on this day, he directed her to bid farewell at once to her present life, and to make her complete renunciation of the world on the following night.

She would have to leave home without acquainting her parents with the step she was about to take, for she knew that they would never consent to her entrance into the religious life. But Saint Clara did not hesitate for a moment in her choice between them and God. Monday night came; she had silently taken leave of all that was dear to her on earth, and was ready to depart. But she found that all the doors were locked, and she had no keys. This was an unforeseen difficulty, still, the resolute maiden was determined that her new life should begin that night. There happened to be a small door in the house which had not been used for years, and had been blocked up with stone and wood; here lay her only hope, and the nobleman's daughter courageously went to work, and cleared a space wide enough to permit her to pass through. Accompanied by a devout lady, a friend of hers, she hurried to the Church of our Lady of Portiuncula, situated about a mile outside the city, where Saint Francis with all his religious brethren were waiting to receive her. They welcomed her with marks of the greatest honor, each one holding a lighted candle in his hand and all chanting the hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus*.

Saint Francis foresaw that Clara, who was now relinquishing for God's sake everything she loved in the world would one day be a great support to the Church, and would begin a new era in its annals, by leading even delicate women to become the devoted subjects of the Cross, and to equal,

nay, in some respects, to surpass the austerities of the ancient Fathers of the Desert.

That Monday night, the 19th of March, 1212, the brilliant daughter of Sir Favorino Scifi laid aside forever all show of worldly adornment. Her first care had been to have her hair cut off, and this was done by the hand of Saint Francis himself; then she put on the habit of a poor religious, which consisted of a piece of sack-cloth tied about her waist with a cord.

Thus from the very outset of her religious life, Saint Clara and Saint Francis were united by the strong chains of heavenly love. Souls whose only passion is to make our dear Lord known and loved, must spread their own love of God throughout the world. And heaven had destined these two generous hearts to be the foremost in the ranks of a legion of valiant men and valiant women all fighting for the conquest of self, the victory which of all victories is the noblest, because it is the hardest to win.

Shortly after Clara had been invested with the religious habit, Saint Francis conducted her back to Assisi, and placed her in the convent of Saint Paul, belonging to the nuns of the Benedictine order; here she was to remain until he could find her a home more suitable to her purpose.

III.

MEANTIME there was consternation in Clara's family, when morning came and she was nowhere to be found. Soon, however, it became known that she had put on the religious habit. At the news, her parents were filled with grief, some of her relatives were exasperated beyond measure. A num-

ber of them hurried to the convent of Saint Paul's in the hope of alluring her back, or, failing in that, with the design of carrying her off by force. They represented to her the disgrace, as they were pleased to consider it, which her family would incur by her strange conduct. Their arguments, it is needless to say, were spoken in vain.

However, they had come with the determination of taking her home with them, and they were not disposed to listen to a woman's reasons for her conduct. Perceiving that they were bent on forcing her to comply, Clara made an effort to escape. She fled for refuge to the altar of the convent chapel; they followed in pursuit and attempted to force her from her place of sanctuary; but so firmly did she cling to the altar, that in the struggle which ensued the altar-cloths were almost torn off.

Such resistance had not been expected, and the cavaliers hesitated for a moment. Then the saintly maiden turning towards them, unveiled her head to show them that her hair had been cut off; and once more assured them that having chosen the Lord Jesus for her spouse, she was resolved to remain faithful to him forever. Seeing that any effort to remove her by force would be attended with much difficulty, they abandoned the attempt for the time being.

Saint Francis, warned by what had happened, and believing that Clara would be exposed to danger as long as she remained in the city, advised her to remove to a place of greater safety. Accordingly, she sought refuge in Saint Angelo of Panso's, a convent outside the city, belonging to the Benedictines.

IV.

AFTER her own consecration to God in the religious state, Clara became much concerned for the spiritual welfare of her sister Agnes, and she prayed fervently for the favor of having her as a companion in the work she had begun. God was pleased to hear her prayers, for only a fortnight had elapsed since Clara's religious profession when Agnes came and placed herself in her sister's hands to be directed as to her future life. She had resolved to give herself wholly to the service of God. Clara's happiness was now complete; with much joy she embraced her sister and welcomed her to the haven where she could be secure from every storm.

Clara's relatives became still more incensed when they discovered that one sister had chosen the cloister only to be followed by another. On the day succeeding Agnes's departure, twelve of the family went out to the Convent of Saint Angelo. Knowing how useless it would be to attempt to change Clara's resolution, they at first feigned to be satisfied with the choice she had made. But during the course of the interview with the two sisters, one of the visitors suddenly turned to Agnes and roughly said,

"What right have you to be here? You should be at home."

Agnes made answer that it was her wish to remain forever at Clara's side. On hearing this reply, one of the knights, forgetting his manhood, struck the young maiden with his clenched fist, and felled her to the ground, and with the aid of the others attempted to carry her off. Agnes could do nothing but appeal to her sister. In this extremity, Clara turned for assistance to heaven, and God was

pleased to listen to her prayers, and to renew the miracle he had wrought in an earlier age in favor of Saint Lucy. The party engaged in the abduction of Agnes had hurried out of the monastery with their captive and were already congratulating themselves upon their good fortune; but they had not succeeded in carrying her very far, when suddenly their burden became so heavy, that they could not make any further progress. Enraged at being baffled in this manner, Monaldi, Agnes's uncle, lifted his arm to strike the innocent girl; but God interposed to stay the blow, and it is said that for a long time after, the arm which Monaldi had raised against the saintly maiden caused him excruciating pain. At this moment Clara earnestly remonstrated with her relatives, who, full of anger and resentment, were finally compelled to leave Agnes in the arms of her sister. Thus rescued by the evident interposition of heaven, Agnes immediately accompanied her sister back to the convent, where she soon after made her act of consecration to God.

V.

FOR some reason Clara did not feel at ease in the Convent of Saint Angelo. Accordingly, she and Agnes removed to a house adjoining the Church of Saint Damian, where the two sisters continued to serve God with all cheerfulness, making each other's company a source of many graces.

Soon this life of holiness bore its fruit. 'The vine of the Lord spread its branches, and bore flowers of a most agreeable odor.' Clara's virtues became known far and

wide. Several devout women asked to be received as her spiritual children. All Assisi felt the presence of the holy maiden; and Clara's name was like a household-word. Young girls placed their soul's delight in thinking of the time when they could become novices under the direction of the saintly Nun; wives obtained their husbands' consent to consecrate themselves to God, all turning to her as the person who could best further their holy purposes.

Clara's own mother, among the rest, felt the influence of her daughter's virtues. Ten years had now elapsed since the Saint's first consecration to God, Sir Favorino was dead, and the devout Hortulana was at liberty to take the vows of religion. She had been sorely grieved, it is true, by the death of her husband but, raising her heart to God, she said courageously:

"I understand, my dearest Lord, why thou hast taken my husband from me. My affection for him was a hindrance to the perfect reign of thy love in my heart. May thy name be ever praised; now I am wholly thine."

Lady Hortulana then placed Beatrice, her youngest daughter, under the care of Monaldi, her relative, and entered the religious family of her saintly Clara.

Here it may be added that Beatrice on reaching her eighteenth year, joined her mother and her sisters in the life of the cloister. She became the foundress of many communities, and died only a short time before her sister Clara. Among Clara's first sixteen companions, were counted several others of her relatives, and three ladies of the illustrious house of the Ubaldini in Florence.

VI.

SAINT FRANCIS had seen the necessity of providing a Superior for the growing community. Though Clara was regarded by all as the one best fitted to govern, she, for her own part, looked upon herself as the most unworthy, and the least qualified among the sisters. Saint Francis had shown a determination to appoint her as the Superior of these holy women; but she earnestly strove to avoid the honor, and for three years her efforts met with success. But at last it was in vain that she expostulated, in vain she pointed out others whom she considered more capable of performing the duties of the office.

“It is God’s will that you should be the Superior.”

Thus pronounced Saint Francis; and then she felt obliged to yield.

The young Abbess entered at once upon her office, and fulfilled its duties from that time forward with an energy and an ability which gained her a wide influence. She soon founded convents in Perugia, Arezzo, Padua, Rome, Venice, Mantua, Bologna, Milan, Spoleto, and in most of the principal cities of Germany. There was a foundation at Florence also, which cost Clara more than all the others combined, for she had been obliged to send her own sister Agnes to that place to be Abbess. Saint Francis had consulted Cardinal Ugolino, the Protector of the two orders, (the Franciscans and the Poor Clares,) on the choice which had to be made. The Cardinal advised him to select Agnes, as being, after the holy foundress herself, the one best fitted for that appointment.

Agnes, in accordance with the obedience which she owed to Saint Francis, cheerfully accepted her new duties. Though she found a very devout and united community at Florence, still, she suffered much on account of her separation from Clara, her greatest consolation during her stay in that city being derived from the affectionate letters which from time to time she received from her sister.

It may not be amiss to state here that another Agnes, the daughter of the king of Bohemia, founded a convent of the Poor Clares in Prague, in which she herself shortly afterwards took the habit.

VII.

SAINT FRANCIS had made poverty the corner-stone of his institute, and men now wondered how it was possible for his religious to observe so strict a rule. But Clara was to make their wonder even greater, for under her institute, women, too, should perform all the austerities practised by the Friars. So convinced was she of the necessity of guarding the strictness of poverty in her order, that when Pope Gregory IX. expressed a wish that her convent should receive some annuity, she became eloquent in favor of her darling virtue, and succeeded in convincing the Pope of the justness of her views.

“Absolve me from my sins, Holy Father,” she said, “but not from the observance of poverty.”

And Clara did not oblige her children to do anything which she herself had not already practised. When her large inheritance had been placed at her own disposal, she distributed it all among the poor.

The strictness of her rule brought ridicule upon the saintly foundress from some quarters. The great argument used against her was, that women could not endure the rigid poverty which she wished to enforce, especially as almost all of those who had put themselves under her direction, had been ladies of rank and culture. Not this objection nor any of the others urged against her institute, succeeded in moving her from her purpose. Saint Francis had approved of her course, and had strengthened her in her resolution; and she felt convinced that she was doing the will of God.

She and her sisters should sleep on the bare floor, and wear no covering on their feet. To sustain life, they should partake only of the coarsest food; and, in regard to its amount, necessity should be their guide. Accordingly, whenever the sister appointed to beg provisions for the convent would return home provided with nothing but crusts of bread, Clara was better pleased than when she came back with a supply of more delicate fare.

Poverty and humility go hand in hand. Humility, then, must be a favorite virtue of her children; for it would enable them to cherish with more affection their darling poverty. According as they loved humility, so, too, she felt convinced, would they love poverty.

And the Poor Clares were pleasing in the sight of God. He saw that they were poor, not in name only, but poor in very deed; and he blessed their detachment from the world's riches and pleasures. One day it happened that there was only a single loaf of bread in the convent for a community of more than fifty persons. The Friars, too, as Clara was aware, suffered from want; so she sent half of the

loaf to them. Then she ordered the sister in charge of the refectory to place the other half on their own table. Dinner-time came, and the community as usual went to the refectory, grace was said, and all sat down in their places at the table. Meanwhile Clara was praying to God for help. Her prayer was not unheard; for the whole community partook of the half loaf, and ate as much as they were accustomed to eat on days when there happened to be bread in abundance.

At an other time, it was found that there was no oil in the house. Clara, on being informed of the state of the case, took a vessel, and washed it with her own hand. Then she bade the nun whose duty it was to ask alms for the convent, to go out with it and beg for a little oil for the community. The sister took the vessel, and was on the point of going out on the errand, when she found to her astonishment that it had become suddenly filled with very good oil.

VIII.

To Clara it was a source of the greatest joy whenever she observed any of her subjects manifesting an eagerness to acquire the spirit of mortification. Yet she took sufficient care to see that they did not go too far in this regard. She herself wore continually around her person, without any intervening clothing to protect her, a rough cord studded with thirteen hard knots; and over that she threw a long tunic made of bristles. How painful an instrument of torture this tunic was, may be best seen from an anecdote which has been preserved.

In the convent there was a holy nun to whom Clara confided all her secret practices of penance. This good religious, who, like her Superior, was very fond of mortification, coveted the hair-tunic of the holy Abbess, and one day she asked Clara to give it to her, as a great favor. The saint at first was positive in her refusal, but, at last, seeing her friend's great longing, she made her a present of the precious tunic. The good sister received the gift with the liveliest expressions of satisfaction, and immediately put it on. Then came a change in her manner for which it was impossible to account. The community never suspected that she was struggling against the torture inflicted on her by a present which she had received from the Lady Abbess. The result was, that unable to endure her suffering, she was compelled in a few days to take the tunic off. She gave it back to Clara, for whose sanctity she ever afterwards had the highest admiration; for she knew that the wearer of the tunic was constantly enduring such suffering as was almost sufficient to cause her death.

Clara always slept on the bare ground, except when her health was very feeble, and nature seemed ready to fail her; and even then, she would merely strew the ground with twigs, and make use of a block of wood for a pillow. During Advent and Lent she took no food but bread and water, and on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in Lent, she ate nothing at all. Such austerities must soon have destroyed her health. Nature claimed a respite; and Saint Francis and the Bishop of Assisi, seeing the state to which she was reduced deemed it necessary to restrict her in these mortifications. They obliged her to take her repose on a

little chaff, and to pass no day without eating at least some bread for nourishment. However, this interference of her spiritual directors had come too late. The seeds of disease had taken root, and they produced infirmities which lasted for the remaining years of her life.

In her most painful sufferings, she was kind and cheerful, her face always beaming with that gladness which springs from a heart that is eager to suffer for God's sake. Even after she had grown old and quite infirm, she would wash and kiss the feet of her sisters when they came home from begging alms for the convent, deeming it an honor to be permitted to touch the feet of those who had just been doing the will of God.

It often happened that one of her children, ailing in mind or in body, would come to her to find relief and consolation. The good Mother could not see her child suffer without at the same time feeling pain herself. Often she would advise her afflicted daughter to go to one of the other religious and ask the aid of her prayers. This was a device of Clara's to save her own humility. Meanwhile she herself would ask God's help for her child. The sufferer would naturally attribute her cure to the sister whose prayers she had asked, instead of to the saintly Abbess who had really been the means of her obtaining the favor from God.

The interest Clara felt in the welfare of her subjects won her their warmest love; but the affection and esteem which her children manifested, did not prevent her from continuing her lowly services to them. Had she not been the humblest among them, she would not have been the greatest. She took delight in being prompt at every duty,

as if her heart was glad to bear the yoke of the Lord. She was always the first in the choir; she rang the summons that called the nuns to their different occupations. And they, for their part, felt stimulated by the example of their holy Superior. The sound of the bell was to them as the voice of God, and they would vie with one another in hastening to obey.

IX.

ABOUT the year 1223, Saint Francis gratified a wish of Clara's to which for a long time hitherto, he had refused to listen. He had obtained from the Pope, Honorius III., a great favor for the Church of Saint Mary of the Angels. This concesssion was a plenary indulgence for all those who should visit this church after having made a good confession and having received absolution. Clara for some time had been desirous to visit a church to which the Holy Father had shown so much favor, especially since it was in this same sacred edifice that she had made her renunciation of the world. Besides, she wished to dine once more in company with Saint Francis, her spiritual father.

On the day fixed upon for the visit, some of the Friars came to Saint Damian's, and accompanied Clara, with a few of her nuns, to Saint Mary of the Angels. After having prayed in the church for some time, they visited the convent. Finally the hour came for dinner, when they took their places before the repast, which had been spread upon the ground.

When all were seated, Saint Francis began to address them on the love men owe to God. As he went on, his heart became inflamed with the love of which he spoke.

His inspired words penetrated the hearts of the listeners, and all of them became rapt in ecstasy. Meanwhile a crowd from Assisi and the neighboring villages came hurrying to the place in great excitement; for the convent and the woods near by seemed to be in a blaze. When the crowd reached the spot which had appeared to be the scene of the fire, they beheld to their astonishment the whole dinner-party of friars and nuns rapt in ecstasy. Then they knew that what had appeared to them to be material fire, was, in reality, nothing but the emblem of the sacred flame which burned in the hearts of those holy religious. When the ecstasy passed away, all the company rose up and departed, without having eaten a morsel of what had been placed before them.

On Clara's return, she was received with all the more joy by her children, as they had had reason to fear that, like her sister Agnes, she would be taken from them to begin some new foundation. They remembered what Saint Francis, on a visit he once made them, had said to Clara :

"My child, be ready to go wherever you may be needed."

To which Clara had made answer :

"My dear father, I am always ready to go to whatever place you may choose to send me."

This however was the only occasion which gave them any serious ground for apprehension during all the years that Clara was Abbess.

X.

SOME four years after the event just related, Saint Francis lay at the point of death. The continual suffering occasioned by the stigmata, together with his severe mortifications, had rendered him unfit for active duty; and his life seemed to be drawing to a close. When Clara and her nuns heard of his sickness, they wrote him a letter, expressing the grief they felt at his illness, and begging him not to deny them the consolation of his blessing. Saint Francis sent them in return a copy of verses which he had written in praise of our Divine Lord; together with a letter of exhortation, in which, as we may well believe, he sent them the coveted blessing. Of the letter only a fragment remains, which runs as follows :

“I, brother Francis, worthless though I be, choose to imitate the life and poverty of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and that of his holy Mother, and I hope to persevere in my choice till the end. You, whom I regard as my sisters, I entreat and urge to conform yourselves to this life of poverty, since its holiness is exceedingly great. Be careful not to swerve in the least from this manner of life and listen not to any advice which would lead you to depart from it.”

Towards the end of the letter, he assured the nuns that they should see him soon. This promise was fulfilled on Sunday, October 5, 1226, the day after his death. His body was carried in procession to the Church of St. Damian, where Clara and her community were awaiting it. Here the procession stopped, to afford these holy religious the consolation of seeing and kissing the stigmata in his hands

and feet. Clara tried to draw the nail from one of the hands, but was unable to do so. However, she dipped a linen cloth in the blood which exuded from the wounds, and took the measure of the body. Afterwards she had a niche made on the side of the tribune occupied by the religious, and in it she placed an image of the Saint.

XI.

As the dew, falling in the silence of the night, fertilizes the earth; so, in the quiet of prayer, grace comes to enrich the soul, and make it ready to bring forth the fruits of holiness. The biographers of Saint Clara inform us that her union with God was so uninterrupted, that she seemed to do nothing else but pray. She used to pass entire nights in contemplation. One Wednesday night in Holy Week, while meditating on the wonderful blessing conferred upon men by the institution of the Holy Eucharist, she became lost in astonishment at the boundlessness of God's love, and her soul was rapt in ecstasy. She remained the entire night in this state, and in the morning, when she was discovered by some of the Sisters, it was feared for a time that their saintly Mother was dead.

She would frequently prostrate herself on the ground and kiss it and moisten it with her tears. The gift of tears which she had received from our Lord, she owed to her great devotion to his Sacred Passion, for she kept the image of Christ crucified continually before her mind. Yet her tears were not tears of sadness; they were rather the thank-offerings of her heart for the graces she had received from God.

The Saint also wept, it is true, because so many sins were committed against the Divine Majesty; but, nevertheless, her soul was always full of happiness. Saint John Climacus says that, "they who have received the gift of tears spend every day of their lives as if they were enjoying a spiritual feast." Tears are the gift of God, and consequently can bring nothing to the heart except love and joy.

One night while Clara was engaged in meditation, the demon appeared to her, and advised her not to weep so much, or she would become blind.

"You will do a much better service to God," he continued, "by governing this convent with ability, than by shedding these floods of tears."

But Clara immediately detected what manner of spirit he was who thus attempted to flatter her with the insinuation that she was a woman of talent.

"If I should become blind," she answered, "and unable to govern this convent, others, more capable than I, would be found to take my place. But as for you and your followers, you are blind in very deed, for you are unable to see the incomprehensible light of God!"

At these words the spirit of darkness vanished in confusion, leaving her to enjoy undisturbed the consolation which God in reward for her victory was pleased to pour into her soul.

She once suffered a deprivation which would have afflicted her sorely, had it not been for the conformity she always maintained with God's holy will. Our Saviour says, "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Accordingly, Clara took great delight in being present at choir and listening to her sisters as they

sang the praises of God. One Christmas night, however, on account of sickness, she could not go to the choir while the community were singing Matins. But though not permitted to be in her old place, she was, nevertheless, quite resigned, for even as it was, she knew she was doing the will of heaven. In this instance God graciously vouchsafed to give her a sensible recompense for her conformity with his good pleasure; for suddenly she heard from afar the voices of Saint Francis's monks, and she could distinguish the very words of the psalms which were chanted as a welcome to the new-born King.

When sickness prevented her from attending to her ordinary duties, she would not allow herself to be idle, although, as may be supposed, she could do no work that required any physical exertion. At such times she found a congenial employment in spinning the finest linen for the service of the altar, and she would send pieces of her handiwork to the churches and chapels all over Assisi.

XII.

REMARKABLE instances of the efficacy of her prayers are mentioned by her biographers. While Frederick II. of Germany was ravaging the valley of Spoleto, which formed part of the territory belonging to the Holy See, he had asked assistance from the Moors, who were only too willing to help him. On his departure from the valley, Frederick left behind him a force of Mussulmans, amounting to about twenty thousand men, at a place now called *Mura dei Mori*. The Moors committed great depredations in the valley and the

surrounding country, and once they came in force to attack Assisi. Saint Damian's convent, it will be remembered, was situated not far beyond the city walls, so this was one of the first objects of attack. The enemy were persuaded that it would be all the more easy to get possession of it, as no resistance could be offered by defenceless women. Accordingly a party of the Moors approached the convent, and at once made preparations to scale the walls. As soon as the Sisters became aware that an attack on the convent was contemplated, they ran in affright to Clara who at this time was sick in bed. The courageous Abbess, bidding them to be of good cheer, had herself carried to the convent gate, where, according to her instructions, some of the nuns had already placed the Sacred Host, enclosed in a pyx, in such a position that the infidels could not help seeing it as soon as they had gained the top of the wall. Prostrating herself before the Blessed Sacrament,

"Can it be, O my God," she cried, "that we have been gathered together here, and brought up in thy holy love, only to fall into the hands of these merciless Infidels?"

Then a sweet voice from heaven was heard, saying:

"Fear not. I will always defend you."

The Moors, who by this time had gained the summit of the walls, became panic-stricken at the sight of the Sacred Host, and the whole force, relinquishing the attack, fled precipitately from the place.

Shortly after this, Vitalis Aversa, one of Frederick's ablest generals, laid siege to Assisi. Clara, when she heard of the investment of the city, summoned her community together, and reminded them of their duty to pray for the deliverance

of Assisi. "Its citizens," she said, "have always been generous to our community, and now the time has arrived to make them some return." The good Sisters, who would willingly have prayed for their enemies, needed not much persuasion to pray for their friends. All that day and the following night they continued without intermission to implore the divine assistance in behalf of the city. Their prayers were heard; for soon a powerful force came to the relief of Assisi, and Vitalis was compelled to raise the siege.

XIII.

It has been attempted here to give an outline of the life which Clara led for more than forty years. As she grew older she did not abate her austerities. Once she passed seventeen days without eating anything whatever; but this was too much for nature, already far spent, and, in consequence, she became so enfeebled that it was thought advisable to administer the last sacraments. The Provincial of the Franciscans came to the convent, and refreshed her with the consolations of the Church. After her communion, her soul's joy showed itself in the gladness which beamed upon her face. She knew that she had welcomed her Divine Spouse to her breast for the last time; but she knew, too, that soon she should see him face to face in heaven.

That same day, Innocent IV., who was then staying at Perugia, came to Assisi, to visit the saintly Abbess. He remained by her side for some time, and his noble soul was inspired with the holiest purposes by Clara's conversation and example. He saw with grief that she could not live long;

but he could see, too, that she was far from being disconcerted at the thought of her approaching death. Indeed, joy had now taken fuller possession of her soul than ever before.

It must have been during this interview that Clara persuaded the Pope to confirm the rule which she had received from Saint Francis. But however this may be, certain it is that the bull of confirmation was issued only three days before her death. In other circumstances, the community at Saint Damian's would have been overjoyed at the approval of their institute by the Holy See; but the assurance which every one now had that Clara's death could not be long delayed, had cast a gloom over the hearts of her devoted children.

Agnes, who had returned some time previous to this, after an absence of thirty years in Florence, was especially grieved at the thought of being separated from one who to her had been sister, and mother, and all that she loved most dearly on earth. Throwing herself at Clara's feet, she entreated her not to suffer the companionship, which they had always held so sacred, to be severed; but to ask God, that, if it should be pleasing in his sight, they two might be permitted to depart from this world together. Clara, who had always joyed in her sister's joy, and sorrowed in her sadness, felt the deepest compassion for her now. But she knew that Agnes was needed yet a little while upon earth. Fondly she clasped her arms about Agnes's neck :

"Dear sister," she said, "our parting shall not be for long; a few days, and you shall follow me, and we shall then be one in heaven, as we have ever been one on earth."

The dying Abbess then spoke words of comfort to her

weeping children as they knelt around her couch; she entreated them to be constant in their love of poverty and humility, and, if possible, to make their poverty stricter. Then, in the excess of her joy at the thought that soon her soul would be with God, she murmured:

“Go confidently, my soul, go confidently, for he who created thee, hath sanctified thee, and hath always protected thee, and hath loved thee with a tender love, as a mother loves her dearest child. Blessed be thou, O my Lord, who hast created me.”

One of those who stood closest to her couch asked her with whom she was holding converse so sweet. Clara answered :

“With my soul, which has been prevented with the choicest blessings of the Lord.”

She expressed a wish that our Saviour's Passion should be read to her, and while she listened, she had a vision of our Lord and his blessed Mother; in their company appeared a choir of virgins, clothed in white, with golden crowns upon their heads; and they beckoned to her, and invited her to join their train.

While enjoying these heavenly favors Saint Clara gave back her soul to God. The coarse habit had been exchanged for the bright robes of the Virgin band; the poverty had given place to riches that surpass all knowledge; the hair-cloth and the ashes and the penance had been turned into never ending joy.

XIV.

SAINT CLARA died on the 11th of August, 1253, in the sixtieth year of her age, and the forty-second of her religious profession. Her death occasioned great sorrow throughout Italy. It was especially felt by the Pope and the Cardinals, who were then at Assisi. People flocked from all parts to be present at her funeral, which took place the day after her death. Pope Innocent IV., with the College of Cardinals, assisted at the obsequies. The choir had intended to sing a mass of requiem, but Pope Innocent ordered them to sing the mass proper for Virgins, as he wished to canonize Clara before her body was placed in the grave. However, Reginald, Cardinal of Ostia, who had been for a long time a friend of Clara's, prevailed upon him to delay her canonization until it could be effected with more formality. Accordingly, the requiem was sung, and the burial took place immediately after the mass.

On the death of Innocent, the Cardinal of Ostia succeeded to the chair of the Apostles, under the name of Alexander IV. The many miracles wrought through Clara's intercession, induced him to enroll her among the Saints of the Church. Her canonization took place at Anagni, in 1255, two years after her death; and August 12th, the day of her burial, was appointed as her festival.

In the year 1260, her relics were carried in solemn procession to the Church of Saint George, from which place they were translated to the church bearing her own name, erected in 1265.

By some misfortune, for which it is impossible to account,

about a century after Saint Clara's death all traces of her tomb were lost. In August, 1850, Pope Pius IX, gave permission to institute a search for her body: on the 23d of the month the search began; and on the thirtieth, after a concealment of five hundred years, the tomb was found. News was brought to the choir, where the religious were engaged in chanting the divine office, and a joyous *Te Deum* rang forth in thanksgiving for the recovery of the long-desired relics of their saintly Foundress, Clara.



SAINT BIBIANA.

I.



IN the year of our Lord three hundred and sixty-one, Julian the Apostate came into possession of the chief power in the Roman Empire. In Constantine the Great, whose reign ended about fourteen years before the Apostate's accession, religion had found a strenuous defender. But now a change was to come over the scene. The fickle Roman mob, soon forgetting Constantine's memory, readily listened to an Emperor who was willing to give a warrant to their bad passions, and encourage their superstitions. Under Julian the Apostate again were seen the days whose records are traced in blood among the annals of the infant Church.

There is something appalling in the life of this unhappy Apostate. His hatred towards the predictions of the Son of God, and his mad determination to prove them false; the secret arrow that caused his death, shot by an unknown hand, and singling him out on the battle-field in the Persian desert; his blasphemous acknowledgment of defeat, when in his death-throes he dashed a handful of his blood in the

face of heaven with the despairing cry, "Thou hast conquered, Galilean!"—all these make his memory one of the darkest which history has preserved. His hatred for the Gospel of Christ he had never carefully concealed; but now that he was Emperor, he appeared determined to obliterate, if possible, the very name of Christian.

Constantine had made it his endeavor to fill the offices of his government with men of the purest morals, and of the Christian religion. It seems probable that it was he who had appointed Flavian, the father of Saint Bibiana, to be Prefect of Rome. Of the birth and earliest years of our little Saint no record has come down to us. Her father, Saint Flavian, and her mother, Saint Dafrosa, were both, we are told, of noble extraction. But they were made far nobler by their glorious death, which ranked them amongst the martyred children of God. Demetria, Bibiana's sister, was also a martyr for her holy faith; and thus our Saint's early years were guarded by the tender affection of three great souls, whom the Church to-day honors on her altars as martyrs. It was from these that Saint Bibiana learned the charms of virtue; by their holy example she was inspired to that faithful love of God, and perseverance in his service which will endear her memory to Catholic children of every age, and teach them what even a little one can do, if she will but heed the voice of God. It would have been more gratifying if we could have authentically traced Bibiana's career from her very infant lisplings. Every hour of life must have been noble in the little child, else the maiden of fifteen years could not have faced torture and death, unsustained by any encouraging voice of friend or comforter, and with-

out any support except the love for God that dwelt within her heart.

Having obtained the supreme power, the Apostate began to deprive the Christians of their offices, and even to take away from them their right of citizenship. One of his first measures, as might have been expected, was to appoint a new Prefect of Rome.—Whatever may have been the dignity attached to the office of Prefect of the city, certain it is that Flavian's influence was great amongst the Roman people; and as he came of a noble family, his household was much respected.

Flavian must have had early warning of the storm that was gathering over the Christian world; and he had reason to fear that it would soon break over his own little family. Naturally brave and high-minded, for himself he did not fear. His wife, moreover, and his eldest daughter, he was sure, could suffer and die for their holy faith; but his heart was sorely afflicted for his little Bibiana. She was then but a mere girl of thirteen years; and when we recall, first the alluring promises, and then the horrible torments with which the pagans assailed the Christians, we shall not wonder that the anxious Flavian averted his face with a shudder from the lowering storm, and looked with sorrowful eyes upon the tender child who stood by his side. His little daughter, he knew, had a brave heart; and he felt that with hand clasped in the hand of mother or of sister she would bravely traverse even the blood-stained path of the martyrs.—But when the persecutors had deprived her of every one to whom she could naturally look for support, and when they should assail the timid child with threats

and promises, what voice would be found to speak a word of encouragement to the heart that had known nothing of the world but the love of a mother and the kindness of friends? Often such a thought must have occurred to the noble Flavian, and often, too, must he have tried to inspire the heart of the little Bibiana with courage to endure the things that were to come.

The picture of that family just before the persecution fell upon them, is a delightful one, and fancy can readily paint it. We seem to behold them grouped together in the chapel of the ex-Prefect's palace. Perhaps, too, a few faithful slaves are there.—They have been informed of the approaching persecution, and have come to hear the instructions of their good master. The Cross is the theme of his discourse; and we seem to hear him telling of the weary feet that climbed the dismal height of Calvary; of the mangled frame, dropping its precious blood upon the stones that lay on the road; of the weary hands that on the cross were opened to enfold us; and of the sad heart that bled with the love it bore us. In those early days, when the power of the throne was the mightiest weapon of Satan in his war upon the Church, the Christian heroes knew not at what hour they might be called upon to bear testimony to their holy faith. But as the desire of martyrdom was foremost in their minds, they kept nerving themselves for the conflict.

Such then as we have described, may have been the scene in Flavian's house when suddenly, down the long street, came the murmur of voices and the tread of soldiers. Straight to the ex-Prefect's house they marched, and into the

very apartment in which the household was assembled. Flavian well knew the purpose of their coming, and with a word of comfort for the wife who sprang to embrace him, and a voice of cheer for the children who clung weeping to his side, he strode forward to meet the soldiers. He was immediately taken into custody, and hurried through the streets of Rome.

Julian the apostate, who fain would have worked evil against the Church, without at the same time incurring the odious title of persecutor, was not content with depriving the Christians of their offices; he took care moreover to appoint in their places such of the Pagans as were known to be deadly enemies to the faith.

From this it is easy to conjecture what was the character of the man who had been appointed to succeed Flavian as Prefect of the city.

The noble Flavian's devotion had not been chilled by the loss of a post of dignity. He had still labored to assist his suffering brethren. Day and night he attended to the relief of the poor, and comforted those whom the tyrants had injured. He was ever near to encourage the faint-hearted to stand up bravely for the faith, and took care to bury with honor those who had given their lives as dutiful children of the Church. This open profession of his belief, and the boldness with which he inveighed against the cruelty of the persecutors, had drawn upon him the anger of Apronian, the then Prefect of the city. Soon the order for his arrest was made out.

When the soldiers made Flavian their prisoner, they led him straight to Apronian's house. Under this man's tyranny

Saint Bibiana is destined to be clothed in the martyr's robes. Before him her father now stands accused of being a Christian.

"It is known, Flavian," began Apronian, "That you are exciting sedition by openly denouncing the imperial decrees."

"I do but resist impiety," answered Flavian, "when I speak against laws which promote the substitution of idols for the one true God."

"That is to say," continued Apronian, "you are a Christian, and on that account will not obey the laws of Rome."

"I am a Christian," Flavian replied, "and never will I yield homage to the false gods that are attempting to usurp the place of Jesus Christ.—Yes," he went on with a holy enthusiasm which won the admiration of those who stood by, "I am a Christian. For my holy faith I willingly laid down my office as Prefect of Rome, and to keep my holy faith, I will gladly, if need be, lay down my life !"

"Tut, man," said Apronian, "be not rash ;—Julian is merciful, and if you will lay aside your whims, and sacrifice to the gods of Rome, you may still serve your country and our great Emperor in some office not below your rank. Think, too, of those you will leave after you. They are weak, and cannot follow your steps, and so will yield when you are gone."

"Do not think," said Flavian calmly, "to allure me with promises, nor to deter me by threats. I will gladly die for Him who died for me. And whither he led, all have strength to follow. Even weakness is not weak when victory

may be purchased by a firm will that puts its trust in God, and when to die is to conquer."

Apronian ordered him to be branded on the face as a slave, and to be banished sixty miles outside of Rome to a place called the "Taurine Waters." Here, on the third day of his exile, Flavian died from the wounds inflicted by his persecutors.

II.

THE death of Saint Flavian was the first torture in the martyrdom of Saint Bibiana. Her pain was not to end until, beneath the lash of the soldier, she should breathe her sinless soul into the hands of God.

Let us now return to the house of the martyred Flavian. Twelve days have elapsed since the scenes which we have been witnessing, and Rome is astir with excitement. After the death of Saint Flavian, Apronian ordered the rest of the prefect's family to be imprisoned in their own home, to be stripped of all their wealth, and to be deprived of every means of support. Moreover he published an edict by which all were forbidden to render them any assistance. He had resolved that either they should sacrifice to the gods, or should perish by starvation in their own house.

Many were the homes laid desolate in those dark days, and many were the hearts that sorrowed and broke, unknown to any one but God.

The palace of the martyred Flavian, which had once been the home of cheerfulness and holy love, was now lonely and desolate. Friends of that house at this time were few, for this was its hour of need; those who had once partaken of its generous hospitality now shunned it as if it were

smitten with pestilence. Only the grateful poor who have been fed by its charity come to look upon it from afar, and offer their prayers for the three noble women who are dying within its walls.

But no—they are not dying!—God has preserved them during these twelve days, and nourished them with his own bountiful hand. And so, one day when Apronian's spies came to examine the house, thinking that the Christian ladies must surely have perished by this time, they saw to their astonishment tokens of life, nay, even of joy; and they knew that some power more than human had been working in favor of the intended victims. Soon the rumor of what had happened spread over the city, and though many of the pagans attributed the preservation of Dafrosa and her two daughters to witchcraft, yet others more enlightened looked upon it as a miracle from the hand of God.

Apronian having given himself up to revelling with his wicked associates, had quite forgotten the three poor victims whom he had doomed to so horrible a death; but now loud murmurs were humming about his ears; and fearing that his clumsiness would excite the wrath of Julian, or that the voice of the people would be raised against him, he determined to try at once some other means of breaking the constancy of the three martyrs.

There was at this time in Rome a gentleman named Faustus, a kinsman of Dafrosa, the wife of Saint Flavian. Apronian sent this man to the house where Dafrosa, Demetria and Bibiana were imprisoned, bidding him use his utmost endeavors to induce them to offer sacrifice to the gods. Faustus at once started on his mission, more anxious

to save his relatives from their impending fate, than to fulfil Apronian's wishes.

Peaceful and quiet appeared the martyred Flavian's dwelling, and the heart of poor Faustus beat fast as he stood once more on the threshold. A feeling of sadness came over him; for he remembered the warm greetings, and the happy smiles that used to welcome him to this house. But now!—"Can it be possible" he asked himself, "that they are dead?—Or would he know the worn and haggard looks of those whom he loved, but whom his cowardice had not allowed him to succor in their need?"

Shuddering at this thought, he entered, and passing along the silent corridors to the chamber of the martyred Flavian, he there found Dafrosa and her two daughters, in all the vigor and freshness of perfect health. He stood for some moments only half believing his senses; but at last he recovered from his surprise.

"I have come, Dafrosa," he faltered, "without any hope in my heart, that I should find you and your children alive; but you are still spared through the favor of the immortal gods. Now you know their power, and, at last, you will consent to worship them."

"Good Faustus," said Dafrosa, "we did not ask help from the impotent gods of Rome. They cannot give assistance even to their own friends, how is it possible then that they could have helped us who are their enemies? Our help came from the God of the Christians. It is he who feeds the birds of the air, though they labor not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and it is he who clothes the lilies of the field in such beauty that not even Solomon in all his

glory was arrayed like one of them. We called on our heavenly Father, and he, the God of life and death, has deigned to preserve the lives of his servants."

This was the first time that Faustus had been induced to listen to the truth; and convinced by Dafrosa's earnest speech, and the evident miracle which God had wrought in her favor, his generous heart could no longer resist the influence of grace. He leaned his head upon his hand, and the memory of Flavian flashed upon his mind.

"I called him a coward," he said, "and thought him weak-minded. But they are not cowards who can die for the truth; it is only the noblest hearts that dare follow in the footsteps of the Christians' God, the God who died for men."

Dafrosa, full of joy that God had touched Faustus' heart, and wishing to pursue her success, set before him many more arguments to strengthen his new-born faith. She reminded him that he alone of all her family still worshipped the hideous gods of Rome; and she showed him how glorious a destiny was theirs who should die in defence of the one true God.

So earnest and cogent were the lady's words that Faustus at length yielded, and asked to be baptized. Soon after, there came a priest to Dafrosa's house, and Faustus received baptism from his hands.

Apronian sat with anxious heart waiting for the return of his emissary. The day was fast drawing to a close, and still Faustus came not. At last, when night was setting in, the truth flashed upon the Prefect's mind. Faustus had become a Christian! Again were his plans defeated; and heaven had turned his very weapons against him.

Apronian's anger was now at its height. Though he felt that a mighty arm was raised against him, still, he would not yield. And on learning for certain that what he had most feared had come to pass, that in very truth Faustus had become a Christian, he ordered Dafrosa to be brought before him.

He again tried by threats and promises of every kind to induce her to offer incense to the gods; but finding that he could in no way move her, he ordered her to be beheaded. They then led her outside the city gates, and as she continued to bless God for deeming her worthy to suffer for his sake, they severed her head from her body. The voice that was stilled on earth, sang that day in heaven the anthems of the martyred children of God.

III.

WHETHER it was that Apronian now felt himself vanquished, or trusted that the changes of time would help to lead the two sisters, Demetria and Bibiana, from the faith for which their parents had given their lives, he began, at all events, to alter his conduct in their regard.

It would be hard to conceive of the anguish of the two sisters when, as they were awaiting the return of their mother, the cruel word reached them that she had been put to death, and although they could not but be comforted by the thought of the glory which their holy mother had won by laying down her life for Christ's sweet sake, yet they felt they would miss the voice that had comforted them, and the words that had encouraged them in all their grief and pain. From her fondness they had drawn every earthly joy and

consolation. But now all ties and affections were broken, save only that love which bound them to each other.

How delightful it is when looking back at those early times, to rest our eyes upon a scene which may be viewed in our own days around the hearth of many a Catholic home; to see children whose affections have been rudely torn from every support, clinging all the more fondly to each other, the tendrils of their hearts clasping and interclasping so closely, that death itself seems unable to separate them. Such was the life, and such was the love of Demetria and Bibiana. Calm as the peace of a convent home, their life for five months was passed in prayer and union with God. They had but little store of earthly riches, for their estates had been taken from them, yet even of their little they gave to the poor. Thus they lived, unknown to any one save only the former dependents of their house, who already looked upon them as martyrs.

But the profession of Christianity by two daughters of a noble Roman family could not always go unnoticed, and after a while it would begin to be noised abroad that Apronian, the Prefect of Rome, had been vanquished by two young girls.

Fearing that this rumor might reach the ears of the Apostate Emperor, the Prefect resolved to make another trial of their constancy; and so he ordered the two sisters to be brought before his tribunal. He thought, no doubt, that with the fading remembrance of their martyred parents their resolution had passed away, and that it would now be no hard task to win them from their faith. But after many questions and much persuasion, he found them still firm.

He then assumed a severer tone, and asked them who it was, that, contrary to his orders, had been so bold as to supply them with food.

"It was God," answered Demetria. "He suffers not the least of his children to go unprotected. For when you had doomed us to death, he nourished us by a miracle of his love; and when you had taken our father and mother from us and deprived us of our estates, he was to us in place of father and mother and riches, and all things else."

"Do not speak foolishly, girl," said Apronian.—"You are both young, and may yet enjoy the position your rank entitles you to among the Roman nobility. Do not stoop so low as to follow the ways of the wretched Christians, but take example from our good Emperor, and from the Senate and people of Rome."

"We do not look for the honors of Rome," answered Demetria. "Life flies by, and bears away with it all the honors it gave. Not all the gods of Rome can lengthen it a day. The honors which we seek are of another life. Time cannot have any power over them. We shall be honored in the eternal city whose beauty 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.'"

Suddenly, while thus she spoke, as if enraptured by her love for the faith she had so boldly confessed, or as if she had already caught a glimpse of that eternal home, she clasped her sister's arm, and sank slowly to the ground; and her bright soul passed away in the longings of its love.

Apronian sprang to his feet in wrath and disappointment. Was it possible that she could thus escape from his power?

Beside the lifeless body of her sister knelt the maiden Bibiana. She called on the kind voice that was wont to comfort her, but it was hushed forever on earth. Her tears fell upon the cold, calm face. All were gone from her now. She was in the power of a merciless enemy. What had she to hope for from the man who had killed her father and mother?

If she would only yield, she might still be spared. But this she could never do. And well the crafty Prefect knew that his time had not yet come. He saw the young girl resolutely striving to calm her grief with a murmured prayer; and he saw, too, that the very pagans who made up the crowd were moved to pity at the sight of the friendless child standing before the bar in peril of her life. Yes, friendless she was in the eyes of those who stood near; but surely the soul that devotes itself to God is never without a friend, never without a home. God will be near us when all others have forsaken us; and where he is, there is a home, and there a friend, and there the peace and joy which the world gives not, and cannot take away.

IV.

Thus far in the life of our little Saint we have beheld her only as a subordinate person. If the persecutor had deprived her of a kind father, she had still been protected by a mother's care; and if she had been obliged to stand her trial before the Prefect, it had only been to give assent to the noble profession of faith made by her sister.

Thus all that was great in her had been overshadowed by the greatness of others. But God is wonderful in his Saints,

and he can raise up little ones to confound the strong And so, when he wishes to confirm by the lips of children the truths which his Divine Son came on earth to teach, he can place in their hearts courage and perseverance to enable them to check the insolence of tyrants, and foil the attempts of Satan and his ministers.

We have seen the once happy home of our Saint made desolate, and the bright springtide of her life darkened with sorrow, and chilled with tears of pain. But the Prefect had thus far failed in all his attempts against the noble Flavian's family. Only one of that happy household now remained. This one he determined to win at every hazard. He would retrieve, in a manner, all his former ill-success.

For this purpose, he ordered Bibiana to be given over to the charge of a woman named Rufina, whose special office it was to corrupt the minds of Christian maidens. Apronian deemed it possible to poison her young heart's devotion, by instilling into it the wicked maxims of paganism.

This woman, Rufina, was a person of some cleverness, and seems to have been an adept in the kind of task allotted to her. If in the end she failed, it was only because God is more powerful than Satan, and because to the soul that is faithful in heeding the voice of God, every barrier must fall down.

No sooner had Rufina taken charge of her new trust, than the artful woman began to work upon the inexperience, or as she thought, upon the untutored fancy of the youthful Bibiana.

"Daughter," she would sometimes say to her, "I do not like to see you wasting the bloom and beauty of your tender

years in this unseemly dress, and this severe manner of living. Your rank entitles you to an easier life; and though your parents are dead and all your rich inheritance is taken from you, yet since I have adopted you as my child, I make my riches yours. They are all yours; use them as you will. And when in after years you have forgotten your Christian fancies, your own estates shall be restored, and you shall win back the position in society which you have lost. I do not blame your wish to follow the teaching of your good mother;—but when the child is taught to disregard the immortal gods, then maturer reason must correct a vicious training.”

But to all speeches of this nature, the young girl, her eyes filling with tears at the remembrance of her own kind mother, would pay no heed.

“Nay, good lady,” she would answer, “I do not wish to use your riches, nor to regain those which I have willingly renounced for the sake of my suffering Saviour. To him I have given my heart. He is rich and beautiful beyond all the children of men; and when he shall take me for his own, all the riches of his hand he will bestow upon me.”

Often thus the wicked woman endeavored to corrupt the heart of the sainted maiden, proposing to her fancy all such pleasures and vanities as are attractive to youthful minds, and endeavoring by every artifice of praise and flattery, to lead her away from her holy religion. But as the Christian heroes, when doing battle for the cause of God, always put on the armor which will best resist the weapons employed by their foes, so, when Bibiana found herself situated in a life of ease and affluence, she not only did not embrace

the pleasures and amusements which Rufina prepared for her, but even resisted their attractions by afflicting herself with severe penances. Yet it was not with penance merely that the saints made head against their enemies, for knowing that from God alone can come the help which enables us to endure, they were earnest in calling upon his holy name in prayer.

In prayer at the feet of God, our Saint found a shield against the attacks of her persecutors. Many a time, on leaving her mistress' presence, she would retire into some quiet spot to beg God's help and implore the intercession of her father and mother and sister, the loving ones who had first taught her the ways of heaven. In prayer she was nearest to all that were dear to her; in prayer was centered that peace of soul, which all the artful schemes of her mistress could not take away from her.

How different from her mother who was gone was the wretched woman that now called her "Daughter!" That holy mother had trained her infant lips to breathe the praises of God, and of our Lady, and had taught her young heart to despise the giddy pleasures of the world, so as to be able to offer her soul unsullied by any suggestion of sin into the hands of her heavenly Bridegroom.

As the days went on, Rufina continued to plot against the constancy of the saintly girl. Sometimes she would lay rich dresses and costly jewels before her. But Bibiana gently yet firmly would put them aside.

"God, whom I am trying to please, delights not," she said, "in these toys—He loves the sinless raiment of a pure soul. His eyes are attracted by the jewels of virtue."

At other times, Rufina would endeavor to introduce her to ladies of rank; but the Christian maiden would always decline their acquaintance. She had learned that home is the cradle of virtue; and she preferred to hold converse with God, rather than with the giddy companions among whom Rufina wished to lead her.

Finding, at last, that all her endeavors were of no avail, the base woman threw off her affected kindness and appeared in her true character. Harsh, impatient, and cruel, she was always looking for occasions to persecute the sainted maiden, calling her all manner of abusive names, and beating her without mercy.

For more than five months the innocent girl had to suffer the persecution of this woman.

One day, after beating her severely, Rufina threatened to have her again taken before the Prefect.

"Do not think," calmly replied the Saint, "that I fear the cruelty or the power of the Prefect. He can exercise only so much power as God will allow him; and heaven will give me strength to withstand his cruelty."

At these words Rufina flew into a passion; and after severely beating the high-born daughter of the Flavians, she had her conducted before the court of Apronian.

It was no strange sight to see the Christians taken from their homes, and hurried under arrest through the streets of the city; nay, they were frequently seen bleeding and dying under the executioner's lash without being charged with any offense save that they would not deny their holy faith. And many who now witnessed the arrest of the sainted Bibiana, may well have seen the little Virgin Martyr, Saint Agnes.

journeying the same road, and for the very same purpose—to lay down her life for the Faith. Like another Agnes, Saint Bibiana passed through the crowd. She heeded not the praise, whether it were in pity or in coarseness, bestowed upon her beauty. She cared not at all for the harsh words, with which some rebuked her constancy; but as if rapt in the glad thought that now at last her sojourning would have an end, she seemed to take wings, and fly into the presence of the persecutor.

All Rome was interested. Men were curious to see the issue of the contest between Bibiana, the delicate maiden of fifteen years, the last of a great house, and the brutal Prefect, Apronian. The young girl's constancy in resisting the artifices of Apronian's creature, Rufina, had been talked of all through the city; and when it was known that she was to be brought up for trial, the people from all quarters hurried to the court.

When the Prefect had heard Rufina's account of her endeavors to convert Bibiana, and how she had failed to move her in the least, he turned towards the maiden, and asked her with pretended kindness if all this were true; and if she had any answer to make to the charges.

"It is true my Lord," replied the Saint, "that I can never for a moment be untrue to my holy faith, nor do anything that might offend my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

Apronian though disconcerted by the calm and modest reply of the maiden, tried to conceal his impatience.

"Your speech is brave, child," he said, "but take care that your boldness do not lead you to follow in the footsteps

of Flavian, your father. You are deserving of a better fate; and in consideration of your youth, you may yet by a word obtain a longer time to consider your course of conduct."

"Nay, my kind lord," said the maiden, "I ask no longer time to consider, for if I had the years of a lengthened life my answer would still be the same. I cannot offend my God. I can look only with horror upon the false gods to whom you would have me offer worship."

Apronian could no longer repress his wrath.

"Away with her!" he cried, while his voice quivered with passion, "away with her! and let her be beaten to death with leaded whips!"

Upon the hall a sudden silence fell; and many a face grew pale, and many a stout heart shuddered at the thought of the dreadful sentence which was to be executed on the gentle girl. She alone was calm and cheerful.

Then four strong soldiers conducted her to the whipping-post. They tied her hands behind her back, and tore off her dress. Soon the brutal blows robed her shoulders in the purple of her blood.

The very pagans shuddered when they heard the dull, heavy blows of the leaded whips mingling with the sweet voice of the young girl. She was praising God, and imploring his assistance. At last, angered at their own fatigue, the executioners aimed their blows at her head. Thick and fast the leaded lashes fell upon her face; the low voice dwindled away into silence, and, drooping her fair, young head upon her breast, the Christian maiden, bathed in the crimson of her blood, sank lifeless at the soldiers' feet.

The Child-Martyr, Saint Bibiana, laid down her life for God and the faith in the fifteenth year of her age.

V.

APRONIAN'S cruelty was not yet sated. On seeing that his own passion had robbed him of his last prize, he again gave way to his fury, and ordering the body of the little martyr to be thrown into the *Forum Tauri*, that is, the Beast-market, he forbade under penalties any one to give it burial. For four days the holy relics lay there unburied; but the very dogs honored the sacred body of the martyr more than did the brutal Prefect. Not one of them dared to approach it. At length, however, it was secretly removed in the night by a priest named John and other devout Christians. It was buried beside Saint Dafrosa and Saint Demetria in their own house, hard by the palace of Licinius.

There, in the home that had been the scene of her earthly joys and sorrows, the relics of the Child-Martyr, Bibiana, peacefully reposed beside her mother and her sister. She had followed them nobly through life, nobly she had followed them in suffering, and torture, and death; and her frail body now rested with theirs in the quiet grave, waiting for the day when her crowned soul should come down to earth in rapture to meet it, and bear it glorified to heaven.

God was pleased to honor his Saint even on earth; and when in after years the tide of persecution had rolled away, he did not permit her to sleep in the grave unknown.

In the first year of the reign of the Emperor Jovian, the immediate successor of Julian the Apostate, a large and beautiful church was erected over the tombs of Saint Bibiana, Saint Demetria, and Saint Dafrosa. It was called the Olympiana, taking its name from a pious lady who had

defrayed the expense of its building. About a hundred years after its erection, the church was repaired by Pope Saint Simplicius; and in the year 1224 it was solemnly consecrated by Honorius III. In 1626, the bodies of Saint Bibiana, Saint Demetria, and Saint Dafrosa were found in this church, and it was again repaired and richly adorned by Urban VIII.

God is pleased to perpetuate Saint Bibiana's glory on earth by the beautiful traditions with which her name and memory are associated. One of these traditions shows how efficaciously she exerts her power with God to cure the epilepsy or falling sickness. Many are the clients who have asked our dear Saint to obtain their recovery for them, and many a thank-offering has been laid devoutly at her shrine by grateful hearts who had experienced her assistance. The gracious kindness of the Saint towards her pious friends greatly increased the devotion of the faithful.

In all the ancient manuscripts her feast is thus set down — "The passion of Saint Bibiana, Virgin and Martyr, who frees from the falling sickness."

In the church of Saint Bibiana there was a pillar of red marble to which the glorious martyr is believed to have been tied when she was beaten to death with the leaded whips. It was customary to stir the powder of this stone in a draught, and take it as a remedy for the falling sickness. So many people came with knives and files to scrape dust from the stone, that it became necessary to enclose it with an iron railing.

About this same church, there grew a little plant called Saint Bibiana's Herb; and this when dried and powdered, had the same virtue as the dust of the pillar.

In the sacristy of the church, a picture was preserved representing Saint Bibiana holding the herb in her hand. This goes to show that the power of her little plant was generally acknowledged.

The Roman Martyrology for the second of December thus records the martyrdom of the heroic maiden: "At Rome, the passion of Saint Bibiana, Virgin, who under the sacrilegious Emperor Julian, was scourged with leaded whips for the sake of Christ until she expired."

On this day her feast is celebrated by the Church throughout the world; and the thronging worshippers kneel in veneration around the altars of the Child-Martyr, Saint Bibiana, while the name of Julian is made infamous forever by the epithet of "Apostate."



BLESSED MARGUERITE MARIE.

SISTER AGNES' STORY.

I.



It was a chilly afternoon about the middle of October, 1864. The wind whistled among the trees, and the fallen leaves were whirling about and chasing each other into corners. Dusk was already drawing closer its curtains of shadow, and lights had begun to gleam in the windows of the Visitation Convent at Oakbridge. In spite of the cheerless weather without, the interior of the Convent presented a lively scene. The girls in the play-room were in high spirits, and at no loss for amusements. It was the feast of Blessed Marguerite Marie of the Visitation, who had been beatified during the preceding August, and the Sisters, in her honor, had granted a holiday to their scholars. To-morrow the girls would have to go back to their books; so they were determined to make the most of their present opportunity; and they romped and made merry to their hearts' content, and often the old play-room rang with the sound of their voices. In the midst of their glee the door opened and a Nun entered.

The moment the girls perceived who she was there was a general cry of welcome to Sister Agnes; some ran forward to meet her, and soon after, they led her to a chair, where a little knot of the older girls clustered around her. She had not long been seated, when Florence Holsby, a bright-eyed little girl of ten years, who had joined the group and seated herself on a hassock by the Nun's side, looked up into Sister Agnes' face :

"Sister," she pleaded, "do tell us a story."

"Yes, yes, Sister," was the general cry, "tell us a story."

"And how would you like," said the Nun smiling, "to hear the story of a Saint?"

"Sister Agnes," answered Jessie Delamere, "tell us the story of your Blessed Marguerite Marie, whose festival has made us all so happy to-day."

A murmur of approval was heard from the rest of the group, and the Nun immediately began her story:

II.

"It is now more than two hundred years since there dwelt at Tarreau, a village of Charolais in France, a pious family of the name of Alacoque. Though not wealthy, they were in comfortable circumstances. M. Claude Alacoque, the head of the family, was a royal notary and judge of Tarreau, Corcheval, Pressy, and La Roche. He was married to Philiberte Lamyn. They had seven children, four sons and three daughters. Two of the daughters died young. The fifth child was Marguerite, whom we know so well as the Apostle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. She was born at Tarreau on the 22nd of July, 1647, and was

baptized three days afterwards in the parish church of Vérosvre. The little girl was named Marguerite after her god-mother, Marguerite de Saint Amour, wife of M. Claude de Fautrières-Corcheval.

Marguerite's saintly disposition manifested itself at an early age in the reverence she showed towards God, and by her horror of sin. Even the liveliness which was natural to the child could be immediately checked by saying:

“Ah, pet, God will not love you, unless you are good.”

“The little girl took delight in going to church every morning, where she would kneel on her bare knees during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. She often felt moved to give her heart entirely to God; so, one day, between the two elevations at Mass she consecrated herself to our Lord by a vow of virginity. Marguerite did not know the meaning of the words she had spoken; but He who had inspired her to make the vow, graciously accepted it, and entrusted the child to the care of his own Immaculate Mother.”

“And did our Lady,” asked Florence, “take great care of little Marguerite?”

“Yes,” the Nun answered, “our Lady Queen well knew how to win the little one's heart, and lead her along the paths to heaven. They became great friends; and, as the child felt awed by the thought of the infinite majesty of God, she was accustomed, in the beginning, to ask her fond Mother Mary for all the favors she needed.

“When she was only four years old she went to live with Madame de Fautrières, her godmother; for this lady was anxious to fulfil her obligations as sponsor for the child, and to form of her a noble Christian woman.

“Adjoining the castle there was a chapel, and this became Marguerite’s favorite haunt. Whenever she happened to be missed from the house, the truant was sure to be found in the chapel, holding her little hands up to Him who said, ‘Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’

“She was not forgetful of our Lady, in whose honor she often said the rosary kneeling on her bare knees,—or if she did not kneel, she would make a genuflection and kiss the ground at every *Hail Mary*.”

“Why, how tired she must have been when she had finished all her prayers !” exclaimed Florence.

“When Marguerite was eight years old,” continued Sister Agnes, “her father died. Six months after his death the little lady was sent to the convent school kept by the Sisters of Saint Clara at Charolles. The nuns soon discerned the child’s earnestness ; and they allowed her to make her first communion about the beginning of her tenth year. After this she often heard our dear Lord’s voice calling her away from her companions’ sports, to enjoy converse undisturbed with Him. On her part, to speak with God became the enjoyment she loved above all others ; and in return, our Lord seemed unwilling that any human affection should twine itself about her heart; he wished it to be all his own.”

III.

“SOME time after her first communion she was seized with a severe illness. Days and weeks and months passed by, and still the little sufferer was unable to leave her bed. At length, at the close of Marguerite’s second year at the con-

vent school, Madame Alacoque decided on taking her daughter home. So Marguerite bade farewell to the nuns, and went to live at Lauthecourt, where her mother then resided. Her ailment proved to be beyond the help of physicians; and for two years more she continued very feeble in health."

"Then she determined to make a vow to our Blessed Lady to become a nun, if she should get well. Her prayer was heard, and perfect health returned to the little pain-worn frame."

"Sister Agnes," said one of the girls, "did our Lady really cure Blessed Marguerite?"

"Not only did she cure her on this occasion but she continued to guide her with special love and care. One day she found Marguerite sitting down while saying her rosary, and she gave her this gentle reproof:

"My child, how comes it that you are so negligent in my service?"

"I warrant you," exclaimed one of girls, "that Marguerite never again sat down while saying her rosary."

"Indeed she did not," the Nun made answer; "she herself declares that she never forgot this admonition. Doubtless it served to keep her heart constant throughout the many trials she had to bear in after life. Her brother Chrysostom tells us that she used to fast three times in the week, and that she made a hair-shirt which she was wont to wear in order to torture her innocent frame. To be able to devote four hours daily to prayer, she would rise before dawn and prolong her devotions into the night. The poor found in her a true friend, for, contenting herself with

the most humble fare, she kept for them the richest and most delicate portions of her food."

This mode of life evidently did not meet with the approval of Florence Holsby.

"Well now, Sister Agnes," interrupted the quaint little thing, "if Blessed Marguerite Marie had been my child, I never would have allowed her to be so cruel to herself!"

There was a general laugh from the older girls at this young lady's very serious views of a matron's responsibility; but Sister Agnes merely smiled and went on:

"Her mother did interfere, Florence, though perhaps too late, as these austerities occasioned very serious results. Our little Marguerite began to suffer from a sharp pain in her side; ulcers, too, began to form on her limbs. The saintly child concealed the pain she was enduring, until a fall she met with one day wrung from her a cry that made known the serious nature of her complaint. Madame Alacoque saw the necessity of consulting a physician about her daughter's health. The physician, however, gave no encouragement. He said they would have to wait until the spring before anything effectual could be done; but, in the meantime, he recommended that the sufferer should be bled. He also suggested some simple remedies; but these gave the sick girl no relief."

"You see, my dear mother," she said, "that human remedies are of no avail. * I have complied with your every wish; but I know, mother, that God himself will cure me within a month; he does not deem me worthy to suffer, as I have not profited by this sickness; still, to comfort you, dear mother, in the anxiety you feel on my account, I

will unite my prayers with yours, and you shall see that soon I shall be well again."

"At the end of a Novena which mother and daughter made together, God was pleased to restore Marguerite to health."

"Now, my child," said Madame Alacoque one day, "since God has given you back your health, take care of it for my sake; you must not die, you must be well and strong; and remain always with your poor mamma, for what will she be able to do without you when she becomes an old woman?"

"Do not be uneasy, mother mine," answered Marguerite, "our dear Lord will enable me to live for you, and love you until he comes to call you to himself in heaven."

"And although Marguerite increased her austerities, yet she never again suffered from ill-health during all the time she remained at her mother's side."

IV.

"AFTER this, my dear children," continued Sister Agnes, "some of the world's sunlight fell around Marguerite's life. Her mother and her brothers almost idolized her, and the affection which her relatives and friends manifested for her was not without its influence in detaching her heart in some measure from the close union it had hitherto held with God. She was prevailed upon to mingle more in society; and, as her devotion cooled by degrees, vanity entwined itself about her heart. She was persuaded on one occasion to take part in a masked ball; and the soft light

of a dancing-room fell upon the form of the future saint, as she mingled among the giddy throng."

"Sister Agnes," whispered little Florence, "was Blessed Marguerite ever sorry for having gone to the masked ball?"

"In after years," the Nun replied, "she shed many tears when she thought of this time, and she deeply regretted that she had yielded to her friend's entreaties. But the sunshine of the life she now enjoyed was suddenly clouded by an unlooked-for misfortune."

"God permitted my mother," she says, "to surrender her authority in her own house into the hands of others. The persons to whom she resigned it, took such advantage of it that my mother and I were soon reduced to a state of harsh captivity."

"Marguerite, especially, seems to have suffered from the despotism thus erected in her own mother's household. She could not even go to church without the permission of these tyrants; and sometimes after two of them had given her leave, the third would say:

"No, you shall not go!"

Thus she was frequently denied the only solace she craved.

How often at this time she pined, though in vain, to be before the altar, telling our Lord her hopes and her troubles! The kind of life Marguerite had to lead was so unendurable that at times she was forced to retreat to some corner of the garden or to one of the out-houses; and there she would pour forth her sorrow in secret to Him who best knows how to comfort us in the time of affliction. More than once she passed whole days in this manner, eating nothing all the time. Some people of the village, touched by the

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sight of her sufferings, would give her occasionally a little milk or fruit. Upon her return to the house, her persecutors, after giving way to a storm of reproaches, would make her do part of the servants' work.

"Why didn't Blessed Marguerite make some resistance?" asked Mary Argon. "If I had been in her place, such persons would not have had it all their own way."

"Yes," cried little Florence Holsby, "and I would have had them put in prison, or into a den with lions like Daniel in the picture;—only they deserved such treatment, and he didn't!"

"Not thus," resumed Sister Agnes, "did Blessed Marguerite Marie act. Not once did she offer resistance to her persecutors; nay, she treated them as though they were her dearest friends. During the night she was sometimes discovered weeping before a crucifix. Long would she look upon the figure of her suffering Redeemer, so eloquent in its silence, for it seemed to say: 'I bore my cross bravely; to be like me, thou, too, must bear thine with a great heart.' During the day the scene on Calvary would sometimes pass before her mind; at other times she thought of our Saviour exposed to the insults of the populace; and again, with the eyes of the soul, she followed him along the sad way of the Cross.

"About this time Madame Alacoque was attacked with erysipelas in the head. A village surgeon was summoned who bled the sick lady, but declared to Marguerite that it would be a miracle, if her mother should recover. The entire care of the patient was then left in Marguerite's hands; who being ignorant of what ought to be done, turned for

help to God: 'Father in heaven,' she cried, 'if it be thy holy will, cure my dear mother!'

"On her return from Mass on New Year's day, she found that the swelling in her mother's face had opened. No one had dared even to approach the sufferer. Placing her trust in God, the brave-hearted girl resolved to cut off every day some portion of the corrupted flesh, as this appeared to be the best mode of cure she could employ. To the great joy of mother and daughter, this treatment restored Madame Alacoque to health."

"Sister Agnes, how was it that Marguerite's mother did not dismiss those dreadful persons, and employ others to attend to her affairs?" inquired Mary Argon.

"That I cannot explain," answered the Sister. "It may have been that Madame Alacoque was under pecuniary obligations to them, contracted during the settlement of her husband's estate; and that thus they obtained a claim upon her which she was unable to satisfy. God, however, rewarded the patient Marguerite for the sufferings which she bore for his sake. During her mother's sickness she had experienced a renewal of that love of union with God which she had felt in her younger days. She knew nothing of prayer, she tells us, but the name; and yet the very name filled her soul with wonderful sweetness. Then she besought our Lord to instruct her in this sublime science; and he was pleased to grant her what she asked; so that she learnt even in the greatest trials to make 'melody in her heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God.'"

V.

“EIGHTEEN years have passed,” Sister Agnes went on, “since the opening of my story. We have followed Marguerite as the little child of four years old stealing away to pray in the castle chapel; we have seen what a life she led as the poor neglected girl, treated in her own mother’s house as inferior to a servant. Now she has bloomed into a young lady of eighteen. Suffering had been unable to write any mark on her forehead. It had rather increased her sweetness of character, and had served to make her prudent and to lead her closer to God. But now the coarse and open persecution from which she had been suffering suddenly ceased, only to give way to one of a nature far more distressing to our saintly Marguerite.

“Her mother and her guardians informed her that the time had come for her to think of entertaining an offer of marriage. Marguerite’s heart sank within her when she heard this announcement. She had long desired to enter a convent; she had made a vow to do so, and now her desires were opposed by those from whom she should naturally have looked only for encouragement.”

“To understand rightly the part she had to bear,” Sister Agnes remarked, “and the struggle she had to endure, you must remember, girls, that Marguerite had the greatest affection for her mother, and that Madame Alacoque left no means untried to induce her daughter to marry. For this purpose Marguerite was persuaded to enter more and more into the pleasures of society. During this time the tempter was not absent.

“Surely,” he whispered, “you would not be so heartless as to enter a convent to gratify your own selfishness, and thus leave your mother uncared for. She will certainly die if deprived of the assistance and comfort you afford her. The vow which gives you all this trouble, need cause you no alarm; you were but a child when you made it, and therefore can be easily released from its obligation.”

“And then he pictured to her in a way that made her soul shudder, the awful sanctity required for a life in the cloister.”

“This,” he said, “you can never attain, and, in consequence, you will lose your soul.”

“But above these whispers of the evil one, a voice, clear and distinct, spoke to her heart: ‘Arise, my beloved,’ it said, ‘make haste and come away.’ It was the voice of her Divine Spouse. He upbraided her, too, for her want of fidelity. Poor tired heart! What a struggle she had to endure! And yet how graciously our Lord was dealing with a soul which he wished to win wholly to himself. Several times he appeared to her in the likeness he wore after his scourging, and rebuked her for the concessions she was making to the world—concessions which were causing him unutterable pain. Touched to the quick, she resolved to take vengeance on herself, by drawing cords around her body, and knotting them so tight that they penetrated into the flesh. She, also, wore on her arms little iron chains studded with sharp points, and took her repose at night on a plank, or on rough sticks.”

“Sister Agnes,” said Mary Argon, “I cannot understand

why Blessed Marguerite performed such mortifications. She surely had not committed any sin."

"It is true," the Nun replied, "that her soul was free from the guilt of any serious fault, but, as she had made a vow to consecrate herself to God in the religious life, all delay on her part seemed like listening to the tempter. Besides she hoped in this way to be enabled to discover God's will more particularly, and to obtain peace for her troubled soul."

"And what did her relatives think of her during this time?" asked the same young lady.

"Her brother Chrysostom," Sister Agnes answered, "declared that she was most retiring and humble, and that her dress was of the plainest kind. She received many offers of marriage, but all were met by a positive refusal."

"God was now working a great change in Marguerite. She gave herself up to the reading of the Lives of the Saints."

"Ah," she murmured to herself, "If I could only find one whom it were possible for me to imitate!" Then she begged our Lord to make her a saint. He answered by showing her the matchless beauty of the three religious vows of poverty, chastity and obedience."

"By the practice of these," said our Lord, "thou, too, shalt become a saint."

Sister Agnes was interrupted in her story by little Florence Holsby:

"I have often wished," she exclaimed, "to become a saint; perhaps I shall, some day; you girls will all be so surprised! I am going to be very good to the poor, because Blessed Marguerite was kind to them,—was she not, Sister Agnes?"

“Yes, Florence,” was the Nun’s reply, “she had so tender a love for the poor, that she longed to devote her life to their service. You remember, girls, the description of Evangeline as a Sister of Charity, serving the sick in the hospital, which Jessie Delamere read for us last Sunday evening?”

“Sister Agnes,” spoke Florence, “ask Mary Argon to repeat it. She knows every word of the poem by heart.”

Sister Agnes turned to Mary, who then recited in a low voice:

“And with light in her looks, she entered the chambers of
sickness,
Noiselessly moved about the assiduous, careful attendants.
Moistening the feverish lip, and the aching brow, and in
silence
Closing the sightless eyes of the dead, and concealing their
faces.”

“And so it was,” observed Sister Agnes, “with our saintly Marguerite. She took great delight also in teaching Christ’s little ones their prayers and spiritual duties, and in tracing out for them the paths of virtue. Indeed, she was never so happy as when these children flocked around her to receive instruction in the catechism. She was frequently checked, however, in her pious work by the persons whom I have mentioned as having control of her mother’s affairs; they upbraided her with despoiling the house in order to give alms to the poor; although the truth was, she never gave anything away without first obtaining permission to do so from those very persons.

VI.

"WHEN Marguerite had reached her twentieth year, her mother began anew to urge her to marry. The tempter, too, was far from being inactive."

"You will never persevere," the evil one muttered in her ear, "and how can you face the confusion of leaving the convent and returning home?"

"It was a terrible crisis, and Marguerite was in danger of being persuaded to relinquish the thought of leading a life devoted to God in a convent. For the first time her resolution wavered. Nevertheless our blessed Lord, he who is beautiful beyond the sons of men, graciously appeared to her one day, after she had received him in holy communion, and upbraided her with being unfaithful to her promise."

"He showed me," she says, "that he was more worthy of love, more wealthy, powerful and perfect than any of the sons of men, and he made me the reproach, that after having promised myself to him, I should nevertheless be so unfaithful as to think of breaking my troth by entering into another engagement."

"Oh, be assured," he added, "that if you do me this wrong, I will abandon you for ever, but if you remain faithful to me I will never leave you, and I will be your strength and your victory."

"With these words, Marguerite drank in the peace for which her weary soul had been thirsting. Her mind was now made up to follow the path our Lord had pointed out to her, cost what it might. To strengthen her resolution, our gracious Lord asked her to permit him to take possession

of her liberty. Willingly she gave herself wholly into his hands ; and when she had once more renewed her vow, she declared that even though it should cost her a thousand lives, she would never be anything but a religious. Madame Alacoque finally saw that it was useless to try to shake her daughter's constancy, and she schooled herself to bear the pain of parting when it should come."

"And so Blessed Marguerite became a nun at last," exclaimed Winifred Aldmar, one of the senior pupils.

"You are too quick, Winifred," answered Sister Agnes, "Blessed Marguerite had yet to make choice of the particular order which she should join.—While on a visit to her uncle at Mâcon, Marguerite went with him to see his daughter, who was a religious in the Ursuline convent there. Marguerite's cousin, knowing her intention of dedicating herself to God, strove to persuade her to enter the convent in which she herself was. It was hard to resist her cousin's earnest entreaties, but Marguerite remained firm."

"Dear cousin," she said, "if I enter this convent it will only be on account of my affection for you. My desire is to go to some place where I have neither relatives nor friends, because I wish to become a religious purely for the love of God."

"Besides, Marguerite heard an interior voice saying, 'I do not wish you to be there, but with our Lady of the Visitation.'

"She knew very little at this time about the Sisters of the Visitation ; but Saint Francis de Sales, as she was once gazing on his picture, had seemed to cast so gracious a look upon her, addressing her at the same time by the fond name

of daughter, that she regarded him ever after as her Father." — "You know, girls," the Nun added, "that the Sisters of the Visitation look upon Saint Francis de Sales as the Founder of their order."

"Still, so urgently was she pressed to remain at Mâcon, that she might have yielded, had not news been brought that her mother was at the point of death. She was obliged to return home immediately."

"Do you not see," they cried, upon her arrival, "that you will have to answer for your mother's life, if you leave her?"

"This was echoed on all sides, even by some ecclesiastics, and, on the other hand, God was continually asking her to fulfil her resolution of becoming a nun. Was her heart never to know peace?

"She was strengthened, however, for the conflict by the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation. This happened in 1669. To bind herself closer to the Blessed Mother of God, she added on this occasion the name of Marie to that of Marguerite.

"Her longing to be more and more like our dear Lord increased. She used to exclaim, as she knelt before the crucifix:

"O my dearest Lord, how happy I should be, if thou wouldst imprint in me the likeness of thy sufferings!"

"This will I do," replied our Saviour, "if thou dost what is in thy power, and dost not resist me."

"To make him an offering of some of her blood, Marguerite tied her fingers tightly, and then pierced them with needles. On the three last days of the carnival, she fasted

on bread and water, reserving for the poor all that she should have taken for her own nourishment. Every day, too, during Lent, she made use of the discipline. She received Holy Communion as often as possible, though not as often as she herself wished, for she was not able to do so without the consent of the persons who had control of her mother's household."

VII.

"IN 1670, Clement X., who that year had succeeded to the chair of Saint Peter, granted a Jubilee to the entire world. A good Franciscan came to Verosvre, on that occasion, to give the help of his ministry to those who wished to gain the Indulgence. Blessed Marguerite Marie resolved to make a most exact confession to this priest. She spent more than a fortnight in writing out her confession; even intending to accuse herself of sins she had never committed. This, of course, the priest would not allow her to do, and our Lord revealed to her that he forgave everything to a will which had acted without malice. Her confession gave great peace to her soul. Moreover, she disclosed to the priest the desire she had of consecrating herself to God in the cloister, and how she had been prevented from putting this desire into execution. The Franciscan Father then represented to Chrysostom Alacoque, Marguerite's brother, that since he was now the head of the family, the loss of his sister's vocation, if it were opposed any longer, would be charged to him. Preparations were accordingly made for her entrance into a convent. But here another obstacle arose. Marguerite's friends wished her to enter the Ursuline

convent at Mâcon; but to this she was much opposed. Not knowing what to do, she had recourse to our Blessed Lady, who graciously assured her that she had nothing to fear. Marguerite Marie then said to her brother:

“It is my own desire, my dear brother, to be a Sister of the Visitation, in some convent at a distance, where I have neither relatives nor friends; for I wish to be a religious solely for the love of God. I wish to forsake the things of the earth and to bury myself in retirement, where I may forget the world, and be forgotten by it and never see it again.”

“Several convents were then spoken of, but she would not make any choice, till they named the one at Paray-le-Monial. When this was mentioned, Marguerite’s heart leaped for joy, and she eagerly gave it the preference. Soon after this, her brother took her to Paray-le-Monial, to see the nuns there. The moment she entered the parlor these words fell upon her ears:

“This is the place where I wish you to be.”

“My dear brother,” she eagerly said, “you must settle everything now, because I will never enter any other convent but this.”

“Marguerite Marie felt so light-hearted that she could not resist manifesting her happiness. Her gayety became so noticeable that some one made the remark:

“She does not appear very much like a Religious.”

“I venture to think,” exclaimed Mary Argon, “that any one who had suffered as much as Blessed Marguerite Marie did to enter the convent, would have been very merry when she got there at last.”

“Now, my dear girls,” said Sister Agnes, “as we have only a few minutes more this evening, and as Blessed Marguerite Marie has gone home to say farewell to her friends, I think it would be better to pause in our story. I shall have to reserve the rest of it for some other time.”

“Yes, Sister Agnes,” cried several voices, “come and finish the story on our next holiday.”

Sister Agnes accordingly promised to come.

“Oh, I’m so glad, Sister Agnes,” said little Florence Holsby, clapping her hands, “and I will never forget Blessed Marguerite Marie in all my life.”

VIII.

TRUE to her promise, Sister Agnes came to the play-room on the next holiday. The girls clustered around her as before, and she immediately went on with her story.

“We left Blessed Marguerite Marie, you remember, on the eve of entering the convent at Paray-le-Monial. Well, on Saturday, the 25th of May, 1671, she bade farewell to her mother and friends, and was welcomed to Paray by the Sisters of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin. She tells us that she was so troubled on that day, that it seemed as if her body and soul were parting from each other. No sooner, however, had she entered the convent portal than all this interior grief passed away. She was home at last. ‘Yes, home!’ her glad heart echoed, ‘home with my dearest Lord, to live and die under the roof hallowed by his presence!’

“Three months afterwards, on the 25th of August, she received the habit of the Visitation Nuns, and entered the novices’ school of self-denial and prayer.

“What is the object of the noviceship, Sister?” inquired Mary Argon.

“As it would be very unwise,” answered the Sister, “to allow persons to bind themselves by vow, without mature reflection, to a state of life for which they are not suited, the noviceship or term of probation was instituted. During this time the vocations of those young ladies who desire to enter the cloister are tested. The novices live in an apartment of their own in the convent, where they are instructed by a Nun who is called the Mistress or Directress of Novices. She explains to them the precepts of the spiritual life, and teaches them to gather “at the foot of the Cross the little virtues of humility, meekness and simplicity, which grow there bedewed with the blood of our Redeemer.”

“I warrant you that Blessed Marguerite was one of the Mistress of Novices’ best scholars,” said Winifred Aldmar.

“She was, indeed,” answered the Nun. “From the first day, Marguerite resolved to banish from her heart everything that could impede the workings of God’s own Spirit in her soul. And our dear Lord himself became her helper; and for some time she heard these and similar words upon awaking in the morning: ‘Thou hast recognized thy path and thy way, O Jerusalem, house of Israel; the Lord shall guide thee in all thy ways; and shall never abandon thee.’

“Although she had learnt from our Lord a method of prayer, yet, (perhaps because she mistrusted herself,) she requested Sister Anne Frances Thouvant, the Mistress of Novices, to instruct her in this all-important science.”

“Can it be possible,” exclaimed the Mistress of Novices,

“that you enter a convent at the age of twenty-three, and are still ignorant of this?”

“Being assured by Blessed Marguerite Marie that it was really necessary to give her instructions, the Mistress of Novices replied:

“My daughter, go and place yourself before our Lord, as if you were a piece of blank canvas before a painter.”

“Obedient to this command, the pious novice gave herself into our dear Master’s hands; and he revealed to her that her soul ‘was the canvas on which he would paint all the features of his life, which had passed in love and privation, in action and silence, and was consummated at length in sacrifice.’ At the same moment our Saviour so inflamed her heart with love for himself, that after this time she was always thinking of how she could testify her love by the sacrifice of self. Our Lord also said to her:

“In the first days of thy cloistered life, thy soul shall feast on the sweetness of my love.”

“The meaning of this was that God would fill her soul with spiritual joy, and that he would likewise grant her other favors, such as he is wont to bestow on his cherished servants. These consolations at times almost deprived her of the power to move. Her superiors could not look with indifference upon these strange manifestations. They could come from two sources: either they were caused by the tempter, or they were operated by the power of the Most High. The problem could be solved but in one way—she must be tried. Accordingly during the time of meditation the pious novice was sent to sweep some part of the convent, or was employed in other occupations of a similar nature. When,

after her work was done, she asked leave to make her meditation, she was told that she had virtually made it already, by performing what she had been commanded to do by her superiors."

"It is related that Marguerite, in common with the rest of her family, felt a curious aversion for the taste of cheese. Now it happened that this was an article of diet frequently to be seen on the convent table. One day a small portion was left by accident before Blessed Marguerite Marie's plate. She resolved to struggle against her repugnance, and strove to eat the cheese, but nearly fainted in the attempt."

"You failed," said the Mistress of Novices afterwards to her, "through want of courage. Hereafter you must not perform mortifications of this nature without permission."

"After commending the matter to God for three days, the devout novice determined to conquer her disgust, and so she obtained the requisite permission from her superior to eat cheese whenever it was put upon the table. Eight days passed in the struggle, until, at last, on account of her health, she was bidden to desist."

IX.

"AN amusing incident happened towards the end of Blessed Marguerite's noviceship. A donkey and its foal were kept in the convent meadow, which lay adjoining to the kitchen garden. As there was no fence between the two places, the animals were constantly tempted by the garden vegetables to trespass on what was forbidden ground. The novices, therefore, were charged with the duty of watching them. It was a grand opportunity for self-conquest, and

Blessed Marguerite Marie determined to profit by it. So she took upon herself the entire responsibility of keeping guard. The enemy soon shewed their natural perversity, and just as the patient novice had succeeded in bringing one of the animals back to its place in the meadow, the other, with all speed, would charge for the kitchen garden, so that their keeper had to act as sentinel from morning till night."

"For the first day or two," said Jessie Delamere, laughing, "there may have been some amusement in it, but after that it must have been tiresome enough. I should have let the creatures have their way."

"What fun it must have been," cried little Florence, "to see our grave Sister Marguerite so much teased! Of course, some of the novices must have had mischief enough in them to laugh at her every time she hurried out with her broom to drive off mother donkey or young master donkey."

"Strange as it may appear," the Nun went on, "Blessed Marguerite prayed as fervently, while engaged in this novel occupation, as if she had been before the Blessed Sacrament. And she did not relinquish her troublesome task, even while she was making the retreat preparatory to the taking of her vows. During this time our Lord said to her :

"Make thy abode for ever in the wound in my side; there thou shalt keep without stain the robe of innocence with which thou hast been adorned. Let thy motto be: 'To love and suffer blindly. One only heart, one only love, one only God.'"

"She wrote in her blood a promise to renounce every interest other than God's greater glory, and to dedicate herself to him for ever. Her promise was accepted.

“On the sixth of November, 1672, she was allowed to make her profession as a nun. Her day of joy had come at last!

“After the taking of her vows, Blessed Marguerite Marie was appointed to help Sister Katharine Marest, who had charge of the infirmary. Sister Katharine was of a bustling disposition, entirely the opposite of the quiet, contemplative nature of Blessed Marguerite Marie, whom she could not understand at all. This difference in character brought many little trials to Katharine’s assistant—not that the Sister Infirmarian meant to be unkind—but it is impossible for some active, masculine souls to sympathize with the timid, affectionate spirit of gentler dispositions.

“Having spent a year in this employment, the pious Nun was sent to teach some of the pupils. They were not slow to discern their teacher’s holiness. It is the child’s privilege to discover the secrets of God, which are hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed to little ones.

“Blessed Marguerite exerted herself to make her pupils noble Christian women, true children of God, and worthy of becoming citizens of the heavenly kingdom. More than once she pressed her lips to an ulcer on the foot of one of the boarders, and sipped the corrupted matter. These heroic acts led the children to look upon her as a Saint; and their opinion was strengthened by several predictions which she made, all of which afterwards came true.

X.

“WHENEVER it was possible, Marguerite used to assist the lay sisters; and she generally contrived to obtain some

laborious occupation. On one occasion, when she was drawing water from the well, the handle of the windlass accidentally slipped from her grasp, and gave her so violent a blow in the face, as to strike out two of her teeth. A piece of flesh, partly torn off by the accident, was hanging loose about her gums. This she requested one of the children to cut off; but the poor child being too much frightened to do anything, she herself calmly took her scissors, and cut off the broken flesh."

"At another time she spilled some broth she was carrying. To mortify herself, she scraped this up, and then ate it for her dinner. She would also eat at her meals pieces of bread which she had gathered about the house; 'for it was not really to be poor' she said, 'to have made a vow of poverty, and yet never to feel the need of anything.'

"The saintly Nun was continually tortured by a great thirst. And yet, on one occasion, for fifteen days she did not take anything to satisfy it. This kind of mortification was a favorite of hers; she would have liked to practise it every week, from Thursday to Saturday, in honor of her crucified Lord. Her Superiors, however, interfered, and bade her satisfy her thirst, whenever it was necessary. Blessed Marguerite obeyed, but, in her extreme love for mortification, she drank only hot or nauseous water. For this indiscretion she was reprimanded; because the obedient heart looks not only to the letter, but also to the spirit of the command; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

"Our Lord himself reproved her for this want of perfect obedience; and once, when she had committed a similar

fault, by taking the discipline for a longer time than her permission allowed, he said:

“Your penance during the time assigned you by the Superior was for me ; but during the time beyond that for the spirit of evil.”

“Did our Lord often appear to Blessed Marguerite ? ” asked Jessie Delamere.

“Yes, very frequently,” Sister Agnes made answer. “Once, as she was going to Holy Communion, she beheld our divine Redeemer in the midst of a sea of light that surrounded the most Sacred Host. He had a crown of thorns in his hand, which he held over her head, saying :

“Receive this crown, my daughter, as a token of another crown, which thou wilt soon receive in order that thou mayest become more like unto me.”

“Sister Agnes,” one of the girls observed, “it seems to me I have heard that Blessed Marguerite was a great sufferer from ill-health during the greater part of her religious life.”

“You are right, my child. A throbbing pain in her head, added to the thirst she constantly felt, was her portion during the day, and at night she was often deprived of sleep.”

“Our Lord one day appeared to her and showed her two pictures. One was of a calm religious life, where all was peace and consolation and perfect health, where she would win the love of all who knew her; the other represented a life of humiliation and sorrow, of poverty and suffering.”

“My daughter,” he said, “choose the one thou dost prefer.”

“Nay, most gracious Lord,” she replied, “choose rather thou for me what is most for thy honor and glory.”

“Accordingly our Saviour selected for her the life of suffering. This was to be her cross, and she determined to bear it bravely. Doubtless she received strength from the example given by Christ’s heroic Mother, who quailed not when she heard from the lips of the prophet-priest that her heart was to become the abode of an ever-living sorrow, but rather nerved herself to endure all for the sake of her divine Son, and the men he loved.

“However, lest the magnificence of the gifts she had received, should prompt any thought of self-love to creep into her heart, our Lord placed a picture of herself before her eyes. The sight of this filled her with so great a horror that she exclaimed:

“Slay me, O my God, or hide this hideous picture from my sight, for if I gaze upon it, I shall surely die!”

“She was also commanded by our Blessed Lord to devote one hour every week, between Thursday night and Friday morning, to honor the anguish his Heart had suffered during the night of his passion.”

“And was she to spend this hour in prayer, Sister?” asked Jessie Delamere.

“She was to rise and keep watch in prayer, at the same hour when, hundreds of years before, the cry had broken from our Saviour’s lips, ‘What, could you not watch one hour with me?’ And thus she was to make amends for the indifference at that time shown to our dear Lord, when his heart was heavy with sorrow.”

XI.

“THE holy Nun had already been favored with more than one glimpse of Christ's Heart divine. She had seen it as a sea of light, as an unfathomable abyss, and as the book of life on which were engraved the words:

“My love reigns in suffering, it triumphs in humility, and it rejoices in unity.”

“But a fairer vision was yet to come, for one day during the year 1674, as she was praying before the Blessed Sacrament, she became lost in the thought of the omnipresence of God. Our dear Lord appeared to her under a sensible form, and allowed her to repose her head on his Sacred Heart. Then he said:

“My Divine Heart doth so burn with love for men, and especially for thee, that it cannot keep its flames confined; it must communicate them to other hearts, and this it is pleased to do by means of thee. It yearns to manifest itself to men, and to enrich them with the treasures which I make known to thee.—For my heart contains graces which will draw men from ruin —Notwithstanding thy unworthiness and want of learning, I have chosen thee to be my instrument in this great work, that it may the better appear that all the resulting good proceeds from me.”

“It was with deep emotion that Blessed Marguerite Marie heard these words.—She was to be the Apostle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; and this mission our Lord himself had confided to her. He had looked for one that would grieve with him, for one that would comfort him,—and he had chosen her.—“Yes,” she thought, “he has chosen

even me, the least and lowest of his creatures !”

“To strengthen her for this high mission our Lord took her heart and placed it in his own.

“See, my well-beloved,” he said, as he restored it to her, “I give thee a precious pledge of my love. I have enclosed within thy side a little spark from the fire of that love to serve thee for a heart, and to keep thy being aglow till the last moment of thy life.”

“Many times after this she was vouchsafed the favor of gazing on that Divine Heart. Our Lord himself commanded her to receive Holy Communion on the first Friday of every month, and as often at other times as possible.

“Another year glided by. To the saintly servant of God it was a year of suffering. The wound which had been made in her side, when, as it seemed to her, our Lord had opened it, to take away her heart, caused her incessant pain. True, it was not an exterior wound; but the heat which arose from it oppressed her excessively.”

“Could nothing give her relief, Sister?” asked Mary Argon.

“She was slightly relieved by bleeding; indeed, our Lord himself had instructed her to have recourse to this remedy; but he also, foretold to her that it would be the source of many humiliations.”

“And why,” whispered Florence Holsby, “did our Lord please to wound Blessed Marguerite in that way?”

“Probably,” answered Sister Agnes, “to leave a sensible mark of what had happened, to assure her and others that the favor conferred upon her was a real one.”

“These manifestations of our Lord, Blessed Marguerite

was obliged to disclose to her Superioress, Mother de Saumaise. This good Nun, for reasons unknown to us, treated dear Sister Marguerite as though she did not believe her; and refused to allow her either to receive communion on the first Friday of the month, or to keep watch during the time commanded by our Lord. The humble religious bowed to her superior's will, for she had been taught by Heaven always to yield obedience in all things to those who had authority over her.

“Not long after, Marguerite Marie was seized with a fever brought on by the interior flame of love for God that was consuming her life. For some time she fluttered between life and death. Mother de Saumaise, who was at a loss to account for the strange things that had happened to the servant of God, ordered her to ask for a restoration to health. If this request were granted, the Superioress would regard it as a sign that God was directing Marguerite.

“Heaven heard the obedient Nun's prayer, and our Blessed Mother Mary appeared to her, and bade her be of good cheer, and enjoy the health that would be granted her, because she had yet a long and painful journey to perform.

“Contrary to what might have been expected, this cure did not fully convince Mother de Saumaise, and she laid the case of Sister Marguerite Marie before some persons of learning, who not being versed in the secrets of a life so spiritual, condemned the holy Nun's visions and ecstasies as not being of God. Who can tell the pang Marguerite felt when this news was communicated to her? Yet her heart lost not courage; she was sowing her seed in tears, to reap her harvest in joy.”

XII

“BUT we must turn our attention for a while,” observed Sister Agnes, “towards another holy person, one who had been chosen by heaven to bear witness to the sanctity of Blessed Marguerite Marie, and to assist her in making known the devotion to the Sacred Heart of our Divine Lord. This was Father Claude de la Colombière, a priest of the Society of Jesus. He was no ordinary man. He was of a warm and sincere nature and of a high sense of honor. His abilities would have won him fame in any career he might have chosen. But a day came when God’s divine light penetrated his soul; and he enlisted as a soldier of the Cross in the Society of Jesus, renouncing all other glory save the glory of Christ crucified. This man we shall know better from a vow which he made:

“I, Claude de la Colombière, do from this hour bind myself by vow to fully and perfectly observe the rules of my order; to reject with horror all that men of the world love and thirst after; and to accept and yearn for the things which Christ our Lord loved and chose.”

“And Claude de la Colombière never faltered in keeping his resolve to the letter.

“This Jesuit priest came to Paray-le-Monial in the autumn of 1674, and became Blessed Marguerite Marie’s director soon after his arrival. She was greatly consoled by his encouragement; for, as he was fully acquainted with the workings of God’s Holy Spirit, he clearly discerned that this same Spirit was leading her soul.

“Towards the beginning of the year 1675, Blessed

Marguerite had a vision in which it was revealed to her that Father de la Colombière was to be her assistant in promoting the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. When the holy priest heard this, he hesitated for some time. But during this same year occurred the great vision of the Sacred Heart.

“The story of this vision,” observed Sister Agnes, “is best told in the few and simple words of Blessed Marguerite Marie herself.”—Opening a small book which she held in her hand, Sister Agnes read as follows:

“Being before the Blessed Sacrament on a day during the octave of Corpus Christi, I received from my God tender expressions of his love. I felt a great longing to make him some return, and to give him love for love, and he said to me:

“Thou canst not make me a better requital than by doing what I have so often asked of thee.”

And showing me his heart, he said :

“Behold this Heart that loved men to such excess, that it counted not the cost, but spent and wasted itself, to show its love. In return, I receive from most men nothing but ingratitude, by reason of the contempt, the irreverence, the sacrileges they are guilty of, by the coldness which they show me in this Sacrament of love. But what I feel still more keenly is that there are hearts consecrated to my service who treat me thus. For this reason I ask of thee that the first Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi be celebrated as a special feast in honor of my Heart, by going to communion on that day, and by making an act of atonement, as amends for the unworthy treatment my Heart has received ever since it was first offered for veneration on the altar. I make you the

promise that my Heart shall dilate at this, and shall shower abundant blessings upon those who honor it, or become the means of its being honored."

"But how, most gracious Master," I exclaimed, "can I bring this to pass?"

"Go to my servant," answered our divine Lord, "he will say to thee what thou must do."

"From this vision," observed Sister Agnes closing the book, "dates the wonderful progress made by the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus among the faithful."

"The servant whom our Lord made mention of" she continued "was Father de la Colombière. When he heard what had been revealed, he hesitated no longer, and on the 21st of June, 1675, he consecrated himself as the servant of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for ever. Henceforth, to make this Divine Heart known and loved by men became the one purpose of his life. He preached the devotion in France, and he preached it in England, when he was sent to that country as chaplain to the Duchess of York. Everywhere he went he told in the very words of our Lord, the promises made to those who would honor his Sacred Heart:

"I will give them all the graces necessary for their state of life.

I will establish peace in their families.

I will console them in all their afflictions and trials.

I myself will be their secure refuge in life and in death.

I will bestow abundant blessings upon all their undertakings.

Sinners shall find in my Heart an infinite ocean of mercy.

Tepid souls shall become fervent.

Fervent souls shall advance rapidly to greater perfection.

I will bless the houses where the image of my Heart shall be exposed and honored.

To priests I will give the power to move the hardest of hearts.

Those who propagate this devotion shall have their names written in my Heart, from which they shall never be effaced."

"Yet good Father de la Colombière was treated by many as an enthusiast, as one deceived by a visionary Nun. If he had been of the world, the world would have loved its own. But because he was not of the world, the world smiled not upon him.

"The bond of friendship between this holy priest and Blessed Marguerite was never broken. They aided one another in the great work. The saintly Nun was a faithful correspondent with the good priest while he was in England; and she derived the greatest benefit from his advice."

XIII.

"AND how was the devotion to the Sacred Heart prospering during this time?" inquired Winifred Aldmar.

"At first, my child," said Sister Agnes. "It made no apparent progress. The patient Nun's trials were increased; her fondest wishes blighted, and her dearest projects crossed. For eleven years her every effort to introduce the devotion in her own community was immediately checked, because the nuns regarded it as a novelty, a devotion unauthorized by the Apostolic See. But her long-enduring heart never lost hope, fervently it prayed on and its prayer was heard at last."

“But was this devotion really a novelty?” asked one of the girls.

“By no means,” answered Sister Agnes. “It bore, indeed, the impress of novelty, since the Church had not yet shown public veneration to that part of Christ’s Sacred Humanity. But we must remember, that though the interior life of the Church cannot be changed, the exterior life can. Or, in other words, the Church may adopt a new way of exteriorly showing her love for her Spouse, Christ Jesus. Thus it was with the devotion to the Sacred Heart; it was not a new devotion in as much as that heart had always been adored by Christians as the Heart of their Redeemer, and consequently the Heart of God; but it was new in as much as Christians employed a special exterior expression of their affection and love.

“In 1682, Father de la Colombière died. Most sensibly was his loss felt by Blessed Marguerite Marie; but she did not mourn for him, for she well knew that he could now gaze forever on the Sacred Heart of Jesus glorified in heaven. She kept his festival yearly on the anniversary of his death. Once she saw him in company with Saint Francis de Sales in the train of our Lord and his divine Mother.”

“And so,” said little Florence, “poor Blessed Marguerite was left all alone.”

“Yes, she was now alone in the strife; but still she prayed, and watched, and fasted, and suffered. Many were the sacrifices she made to appease God’s injured sanctity; indeed to make atonement for the sins of men seems to have been peculiarly her part. And there was need of this reparation, because France, Blessed Marguerite’s country

was wandering from her obedience to the Church. Louis XIV. then ruled the land, while the pontifical throne was occupied by Innocent XI. The clergy of France, following the unfortunate advice of Bossuet, the Bishop of Meaux, were setting Innocent's authority at defiance. This scandal could not but cause great anguish to Blessed Marguerite Marie, and she prayed and fasted all the more.

"When in the month of May, 1684, the nuns of Paray-le-Monial elected Mother Marie Christine Melin to be their Superioress, Blessed Marguerite Marie was chosen assistant. Some months later, the Mistress of Novices fell sick, and Marguerite was appointed to take her place. Few were as eminently fitted for this office as she was; for it requires a person of tried virtue to fill it.

"Your virtue," she was wont to say, "must be strong; you must despise that appearance of virtue, which, like a vapor, appears for a time, and afterwards vanishes away. I do not know any exercise of piety better calculated to raise a soul, in a short time, to the highest sanctity, or to make it feel more fully the true delight which is found in the service of God than the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

"As the feast of Saint Marguerite, her patron, fell on Friday in the year 1685, she requested the novices to offer to the Sacred Heart of our Lord whatever little marks of affection, they intended to pay to herself on that day.

"Listen, girls, to what the good novices did. They drew with pen and ink on a sheet of paper a heart, encircled with a crown of thorns, and surmounted by a cross. They then placed their drawing on a table which they had pre-

pared and decorated with flowers to receive it. Then the saintly Mistress of Novices and her children knelt down before the simple picture and consecrated themselves to the Sacred Heart. The day was passing very happily, but before night their joy was turned into sorrow. Some of the good Sisters, reflecting that this devotion had not as yet been solemnly authorized by the church, complained to the Superioress of what had been done ; and the Mistress of Novices was forbidden to make any display of the devotion except within the precincts of the Novitiate."

XIV.

"WHILE Mistress of Novices, Marguerite suffered much on one occasion from the interference of secular persons, who attempted to put a false construction on her conduct by attributing unworthy motives to her. It seems that a young lady had come to be a Nun. She was of a good family, but of so timid a nature, that, when her father told her that she would have to enter a convent, the young girl bowed unquestioning to his will. As she was very docile, nobody seemed to have the least doubt of her vocation to the religious state. But Blessed Marguerite Marie soon clearly saw that the new postulant was not called to a life in the cloister. The young lady's father was accordingly advised to come and take his daughter home. He received this news with a very bad grace, and did not comply with the request until his daughter herself asked to be allowed to leave the convent. Upon her return he vented his wrath against the holy Mistress of Novices, whom he accused of being a visionary and a fool."

“Even a Religious, to whom the case was referred, went so far as to denounce Marguerite Marie as a hypocrite. The people were clamorous for her dismissal from the office she held, and threatened to summon her before the civil court. The storm in time subsided, but the close of the year 1686 saw another Sister appointed to the charge of Mistress of Novices.

“During these trials Marguerite found a true friend in the person of Father Rolin, of the Society of Jesus, who came to Paray-le-Monial in 1685. It was at his request that she wrote the story of her life.

“My chronicle is rather long, my dear children,” Sister Agnes here interrupted herself to say, “but not without interest, I hope.”

“Oh Sister, please go on,” cried Jessie Delamere, “and tell us whether Blessed Marguerite ever saw the accomplishment of her desire.”

“Indeed, yes, and, situated as she then was, sooner than she could have hoped for. It happened this way: One of the nuns, Sister Mary Magdalen des Escures, had been quite averse to the devotion towards the Sacred Heart. Suddenly, on the very day appointed by our Lord for the feast, she conceived the idea of erecting a little altar in the convent. On this she placed a picture of the Sacred Heart, and surrounded it with flowers. Then, in a note which she laid on the altar, she invited the nuns to venerate this symbol of our Divine Saviour’s love.

“The news soon spread through the convent; and, as if by some sudden inspiration, all hastened to comply with Sister des Escures’ request. Not content with this, they

determined to have a painting of the Sacred Heart executed, and soon after they resolved to erect a little chapel in its honor. The convent pupils were so full of enthusiasm that they contributed their pocket money for this purpose; while the good lay sisters worked harder in the garden, so as to be able to offer their mite towards the building.

“The new chapel was dedicated on the 7th of September, 1688. This was Blessed Marguerite Marie’s hour of triumph. She had met with disappointment, but she had never lost hope. On the morning of the dedication she was so deeply absorbed in prayer that she did not move during the whole course of the ceremonies.”

“Sister Agnes,” inquired Jessie Delamere, “were any of her family living at that time?”

“Two of her brothers were still alive, Chrysostom and James. Her mother died five years after Blessed Marguerite Marie’s entrance into the convent. Chrysostom was older than his sister. By profession he was a lawyer. He was at one time Mayor of Bois-Sainte-Marie. James was younger than Marguerite, and was *Curé* at the above-mentioned place, where Chrysostom afterwards built a chapel in honor of the Sacred Heart, while James founded masses to be offered in it. They were both dearly loved by their sister, and she made them fervent disciples of the Sacred Heart.

“A messenger one day came in all haste to the convent announcing to Blessed Marguerite that her brother James had been stricken with apoplexy, and requesting her prayers for his recovery. The Nun, after recourse to God, prepared three slips of paper, and on each of these she wrote an invocation to the Sacred Heart.”

"Dip these slips in water," was the order she gave the messenger, "and then give some of the water to my brother."

"Her instructions were followed, and James was completely cured."

XV.

"BUT trials were no longer the saintly Nun's portion. Her virtue was acknowledged by all, and those who had formerly been her persecutors, were now most earnest in showing veneration.

"Marguerite during all this time, was never tired of speaking of what her soul most cherished, and making known the favors that would be granted to those who should honor the Divine Heart of Jesus.

"The year 1690 came, and the Apostle of the Sacred Heart felt that God would soon call her to himself. She therefore prepared for death by a retreat, which she made with great fervor. She began it on the 22nd of July; when October came the Sisters saw that they would soon lose their beloved Marguerite. Eight days went by, and then she was unable on account of a fever to leave her bed. On the ninth day of the fever, she asked to be allowed to receive the holy Viaticum. But the physician, judging from her symptoms, that she was not in immediate danger, advised her to wait until the following day."

"Happily," she whispered to one near by, "I foresaw that the physician would not consider that I should die to night, and so I received my last communion as my Viaticum."

"In her humility she was anxious that nothing should be told after her death of the wonderful ways of God in

guiding her soul. She bound her Superior to secrecy in this matter; and also requested one of the sisters to write to Father Rolin asking him to destroy her letters and to keep secret all that she had communicated to him respecting the privileges with which she had been favored by our Lord."

"Between six and seven o'clock that evening she received extreme unction; one hour afterwards, and the soul of Blessed Marguerite Marie was speeding to its rest in the bosom of God.

"On the next day they buried her in the convent cemetery. As soon as her death became known, the word passed from mouth to mouth through the town,

"The Saint is dead!"

"The people manifested their veneration by making requests for the little objects which had been in her possession, as they desired to have some relic to remind them of the Servant of God. The first inquiry into her life and miracles with a view to her canonization was made in 1715. The depositions then taken are very valuable, as many who had been acquainted with her were still living, and gave their testimony from personal knowledge. Her first life, written by Languet, Bishop of Soissons, was published in 1729.

"When the Reign of Terror spread dismay and ruin over France, the nuns of Paray-le-Monial were forced to leave their convent home, and seek shelter wherever they could, each one for herself. So in 1792, the relics of Blessed Marguerite Marie were confided to one of the Sisters who had friends living near the convent. Later on, this Sister was obliged to return to her family, and she entrusted the treasure to another of the nuns, who lived, it must be sup-

posed, not far distant. The Sisters regained possession of their old convent home in 1823, and Marguerite's relics were then restored to them. The year following, the Holy See honored Marguerite Marie with the title of Venerable. Forty years later, on the 24th of April 1864, she was beatified by Pius IX, and the 17th of October was assigned as the day of her feast.

"The gentle Apostle of the devotion to the Sacred Heart has triumphed at last; the wished-for feast has been instituted, and wherever the faith of the Cross is professed, churches and chapels and pious confraternities are dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

"And now my dear children," said Sister Agnes, "my story is finished.—Let us not, however, forget the Sacred Heart, for whose sake Blessed Marguerite courageously bore so many trials. Only to think of it: our Divine Lord is yearning for our poor human affection,—can we refuse to give him love for love?"

With a cheerful "good night," and a warm "God bless you all," for her youthful listeners, Sister Agnes rose and left the play-room.



SAINT BARBARA.

I.



ACCORDING to the most authentic records, Saint Barbara was born in Nicomedia, a city of Asia Minor, about the year 285.

Dioscorus, her father, was a pagan. Of her mother nothing whatever is known; and we are not even told how the Saint herself became a Christian.

Barbara was the sole issue surviving from her parents' marriage, but she never knew the fond love and care which are generally bestowed upon an only child. Most of her life was destined to be passed in solitude and to be made wretched by her father's unfeeling conduct.

Dioscorus was stern of look and speech. Fortune had favored him with a noble name, with vast estates, and influence. But these very advantages proved his bane. He reared idols in his soul to wealth and rank. To these he bowed the knee, and to these he sacrificed in the end all that ought to be dearest to a father's heart.

Such a man, as we can readily imagine, could prove no very congenial companion to a child whose nature seemed

to ask rather for the warmth and sunshine of love as its support, than for the usual sustenance that serves to keep soul and body together. But in spite of her father's coldness Barbara's childhood days glided on calmly and happily enough. Perhaps the secret of the little girl's contentment lay in this, that God, to make up for the want of fond parents and friends, measured out to her in advance a portion of that heavenly joy which she was afterwards to merit by the shedding of her blood. However, with the days of childhood, the little earthly happiness that Barbara had ever known, passed away.

During her early years, our Saint, as we have intimated, was seldom the object of any regard from her father; perhaps as occasionally she met his view, the regret would spring up in his heart that in her stead a son had not been born to him, who might have been a worthy representative of his house. However this may be, it seems certain that he looked on his daughter, now emerging from childhood, merely as one who was to inherit his estates, and on whom depended his only hope that his race would not become extinct. We may believe that he had formed the resolve to teach his daughter how to wear becomingly the dignity of her future station. What precise measures he at first took to attain his object are unknown. It may be presumed, however, that he began by manifesting more interest in Barbara's education and pursuits; and that his eagerness to carry out his purpose soon laid open the motives of his change of manner.

Dioscorus, who took the greatest pride in his ancestors' achievements, was actuated in his intercourse with his

daughter by the thought that on his words, perhaps, depended the perpetuation of his house; and he would rehearse to the maiden in vivid language the glories of her forefathers, urging her to acquire the grace and dignity of manner which became her as their daughter.

Ancient writers speaking of Saint Barbara say that at this period of her life she grew in loveliness day by day, her beauty being heightened by the charm of her modesty.

The next step Dioscorus took in pursuance of his designs would seem to furnish us with a hint that Barbara did not show herself an over-apt pupil in the school of worldliness. He had her removed to a tower in his possession, and gave orders that she should not be permitted to go beyond its walls. Yet the saintly maiden was well content to remain even in such isolation as this, for she could at all times live happy in quiet communication with God and the Holy Angels.

It is the common opinion of the biographers of our Saint that Dioscorus took the resolution to imprison his daughter chiefly because he feared that her beauty would attract the attention of suitors for her hand, some of whom might not prove eligible; whereas, he argued, were she quite apart from all society, he could call her at any moment from her retreat to espouse a husband of his own choosing. He little thought that even in the recesses of her tower his daughter's heart could be won, or that there she could be betrothed to a Bridegroom far nobler than any suitor whom even the proud Dioscorus might deem worthy of her hand.

II.

THE sainted maiden had learned in these latter years what a joy there is in solitude. Her soul became inflamed with heavenly love, and she made a vow of perpetual virginity to the Lord Christ. And God who searches the hearts of men, saw the beauty and chasteness of her soul and accepted her as the Spouse of his Divine Son. Many a day, after making her vow of consecration she heard in spirit the words:

“Put me as a seal upon thy heart, and as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death.”

So in her lonely tower-home, not lonely however to her, since God, who was her all, abided there, our generous Saint gave herself up wholly to live as became Christ's virginal Spouse, and her love fulfilled love's praise: it was strong as death.

It did not long suit the purposes of Dioscorus to keep Barbara in her solitude. He soon fixed upon a person whom he deemed a fit husband for her; and one day while the holy maiden was absorbed in prayer, the tidings came from her father that she was to leave her tower-home to prepare for her marriage. Following straight upon this message the haughty noble came in person to announce his wishes. But during the short time of her seclusion Barbara had become quite different from the Barbara of other days. No longer was she a weak, yielding girl, but the steadfast Spouse of Christ; and she could meet with intrepid gaze the angry looks of her father. She had been vouchsafed a share of that strength which had conquered the powers of the world.

Dioscorus believed that his proposal could not fail to meet with a ready acceptance, since to his mind anything must be a welcome alternative to dwelling in a lonely tower; but great was his astonishment on hearing Barbara's reply:

"I have already pledged my troth to one whom I cannot forsake. I will cleave to him whom I love. He shall be mine beyond all time into the length of eternity."

These words of determination did not, contrary to what one might suppose, excite the passionate Dioscorus to anger. It may be that in his daughter's bold speech he fancied he saw a movement of the proud blood which coursed through his own veins, and that he entertained hopes of her yielding before the time appointed for the nuptials. Certain it is he showed no signs of displeasure, but simply gave Barbara in charge to his steward, and then hastened on a journey abroad, hoping that during his absence a favorable change would take place, and her mind be drawn from its present bent. In the mean time he did not neglect other more immediate means of turning Barbara to his will; and with a view to winning her over by kindness he ordered his servants before his departure, to build a splendid bath-house for her enjoyment.

Barbara, always the steadfast friend of retirement and prayer, for some time took little interest in the erection of the new building; but happening one day to go down to look at it, she spoke to the workmen and learned for whom and for what purpose the structure was intended.

At the sight of the graven images of gods and goddesses that occupied the niches, and protruded their faces above the pillars, she sighed, for she reflected that He who alone merits

divine honor had been given no mark of recognition. But she had noted the readiness with which the workmen seemed to lend themselves to her wishes, for they had received orders so to do; and she deemed the present occasion a fitting one for furthering God's glory.

She was not long at a loss for a means of carrying out her desire: for the soul that loves God can easily find devices for testifying its love. She had noticed that there were two windows admitting light into the structure, and now the happy thought came to her that she could do some honor to the Holy Trinity if she were to induce the workmen to add a third window to the other two. She had only to make known this wish to see it on the way to be fulfilled. Then approaching one of the marble pillars she drew with her finger the sacred sign of the cross upon its surface. The hard stone yielded like wax to the maiden's touch and the impression appeared quite plain upon the pillar.

And there the symbol of Christianity remained distinct for years and years, and God afterwards hallowed the spot with many miracles. There in after days the sick were healed, misery found relief, sinners were recalled to the life of grace. And as all these wonders were wrought through Saint Barbara's intercession, we can form some estimate of how dear she was to God, when in the fulness of her faith she drew her finger over the pillar's face and ornamented it with the deeply graven sign of the cross. Her faith was her power. Faith is the pulse of all spiritual being; where it is strong, the Christian soul is strong.

On his return Dioscorus noticed that his orders regarding the erection of the bath-house had not been strictly followed.

But he was not annoyed at this, since he supposed that the changes were made according to the recommendation of his daughter, whose preferences he had desired should be respected.

However, as he was passing through the building, and narrowly scanning the fret-work and the carvings on the pillars, the hated symbol of Christianity met his eyes, and awoke all the fierceness that lay sleeping in his heart. He sent for the servants, and gleaning from their confused and hesitating replies, that Barbara was accountable for the impression of the cross made on the pillar, he summoned her to his presence.

The heroic maiden calmly replied to his angry demand for the reason of her strange conduct. Without a tremor in her voice she made known the motives which impelled her to act as she had done. As she touched upon the sacred themes which had so often formed the subject of her meditations, she became more animated, and related to her pagan father, who stood as if petrified, the history of the Redemption of fallen man and the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. Proud Dioscorus shuddered at the thought of his daughter being a Christian, and stared aghast at her.

However, this was but the first effect of Barbara's words, and when he recovered himself and weighed the full consequences with which Barbara's profession of faith might be fraught to himself, he drew his sword to slay her, and, had his hand been true, Barbara had even then been ranked among the martyrs.

But unnerved from excitement as he was, Dioscorus could manage his weapon but awkwardly, and the brave girl,

turning aside as the steel flashed downward, avoided the stroke and fled into the hall. Once there, she sped along its length, and gaining a retired passage which opened into a grove at the rear of the house, made good her escape.

Dioscorus pursued her retreating form through the hall with all the speed lent him by his hatred for Christianity, and his anxiety to save himself from the disgraceful imputation of having reared in his house a viper of the Christian brood.

He saw her take the direction of the passage which led into the copse, and thither he shaped his course in pursuit. He quickly gained the open air and his eyes gleamed as he espied his victim only a few rods in advance, her flagging steps giving evidence that she could not long continue her flight. Summoning all his speed he made a desperate effort to come up with her and he soon succeeded in getting within reach.

But here his fell purpose was to be defeated. God willed that his Saint should suffer awhile longer before receiving the martyr's crown. As Dioscorus put forth his hand to seize her, it suddenly struck against a hard and unyielding substance; and to his astonishment, he saw that the obstacle which had stayed his hand was an immense rock, which on the instant had sprung up from the earth to bar his way.

III.

ONE might think that this display of divine power in favor of the maiden, would have made a deep impression on the mind of Dioscorus, either by awakening in him a sense of remorse for his intended crime, or by inspiring his

heart with a wholesome fear of the hand which had thus interposed between him and his victim. But he had steeled his heart, and he was deaf not only to the voice of conscience but also to the instinct of nature, which commands the father to love his child.

Not yet would he give up the pursuit. With unfaltering resolution he skirted the rock until he had gained the other side, and there he looked about for some trace of Barbara.

He met however with ill-success; but as he had hopes of falling in with some one who might have observed her, he pushed on until he met with two shepherds who were tending their flocks. These shepherds had seen Barbara in her flight, which she had resumed after heaven's hand had miraculously delivered her by interposing the rock. The men, never suspecting Dioscorus' design on the life of the young girl, gave the information he so eagerly desired regarding the path she had taken.

Dioscorus, much elated, hurried on in the direction indicated, and soon his cruel eyes caught sight of the maiden's form, then far ahead. Straining every nerve, he pursued. Soon only a few steps intervened between them, and Barbara's slackened pace betokened that she could not long evade him. In another moment he was at her side and had her in his power.

First he wreaked his vengeance in blows upon her delicate frame; then clutching her by the hair, he dragged her along the rugged path to a small house, into which he thrust her, cutting off the last hope of escape by barring every point of egress and setting guards around the spot.

On his way homeward his thoughts were employed in

devising what manner of punishment he could inflict on Barbara without bringing himself into danger. At last a plan struck him: he would have her taken before the Roman prefect on the charge of being a Christian. In this, he argued, he could obtain a two-fold advantage. For as he felt that his daughter would not deny her faith before the Roman tribunal, he could add to the honor of proving himself a devoted friend of the gods, the pleasure of revenge, when he should see Barbara undergoing the torments to which those who persevered in professing Christianity were usually condemned.

As soon as possible he set about putting this plan into execution, and from her prison-house in the woods Barbara was led to the tribunal of Marcian, prefect of the city. Dioscorus was there awaiting her arrival. He had already denounced his daughter, and had asked that the rigorous statutes enacted against the Christians should be enforced in her case to the very letter.

As she entered the court in all the grace of youth and loveliness, many an eye was suffused with tears, but in her father the sight of her only inspired a hatred tenfold greater than before, and he went so far as to exact an oath from the Prefect to make her feel every penalty he had it in his power to inflict.

Marcian, the prefect of the city, before whom Barbara now stood, was a worthy servant of his master, Maximinus, and though he could not help being shocked at the unnatural spectacle of a father demanding the execution of his own daughter, still the appreciation he had of his own interests had too strong a hold upon him to permit him to show mercy

where mercy would be construed as a dereliction of duty. He did try however to persuade Barbara to offer worship to the gods, laying before her, apparently in a kindly manner, the folly of adhering to a religion which he believed to be full of superstition. Her obstinacy, he added, must entail such consequences as torture and death.

It needed but a little while to convince him that he had undertaken a fruitless task, for she who was a captive for Christ's sake, did not seem even to hear the words he addressed to her. She stood there unmoved in the midst of the crowd, her hands clasped and her eyes upturned to heaven, apparently unconscious of all that passed around her.

Marcian now had recourse to the torture. He gave her in custody to some of his soldiers whom he ordered to scourge her. The soldiers needed no incentives to urge them on to their cruel work, and they immediately led the young girl to the place of torture. There roughly divesting her of all clothing, they scourged her with whips made of sinews, until the blood poured from her wounds and saturated the ground with its sacred stream. When they grew tired of this cruel work they took coarse hair-cloths, and with these rubbed the maiden's mangled and sensitive frame. Throughout the ordeal Barbara bore herself as became the true Spouse of Christ, not flinching beneath the cutting lash, nor the more exquisite torture of the hair cloths which sent thrills of pain through every fibre of her body.

The soldiers durst not go too far in torturing the maiden, for they knew that Marcian was not anxious for her death, so they finally conducted her to the prison, where they confined her securely in a dungeon.

IV.

NIGHT had come, adding darkness to the gloom which pervaded the Christian martyr's cell. While absorbed in prayer, Barbara, was suddenly startled by a gleam of light, and lifting her eyes she beheld a flood of radiance that seemed to fall from heaven. Then the loving look of the Lord Christ beamed upon her. Words of sweet comfort followed, and he gave her the assurance that he, her Divine Spouse, would be always by her side, would guard her with his protecting hand, and would soon take her to himself forever. Then the vision passed, and Barbara felt her entire frame, upon which a moment before livid bruises and gaping wounds had alone been visible, now restored to perfect health. Again she devoted herself to prayer, offering acts of praise and thanksgiving to God.

At length the light, stealing through the embrasures of her dungeon, told of the approach of day, and soon after the tread of armed men echoed along the passage leading to her cell. The soldiers stopped before the door.

Their commander entered and acquainted Barbara with the object of his coming. He had to conduct her, he said, to the court of justice. Barbara followed him with alacrity, and taking the place assigned her in the midst of the guard was led to the scene of yesterday's trial. She walked to the place set apart for her with a buoyant step, her face wearing a glad look, which in the happiness of her heart she would not, and could not hide.

The Prefect's face wore a look of surprise as he saw her approach.—There appeared no indication of the sufferings she had undergone on the previous day. But surprise

gave place to astonishment when she came nearer, and he could assure himself that she was in perfect health, without scath or scar, but fair and beautiful as ever. He had seen the Lady Barbara the day before covered with wounds. But now!—what enchantment was this! Soon, however, his countenance asumed a cold and impassive expression, the proper aspect in Marcian's estimation to be worn by a man who, as guardian of great Rome's weal, ought to acquit himself of his duty as became a Roman.

At first he could not bring himself to believe in this marvel, but being unable to dispute the fact, he cleverly attributed it to the good will of the gods, who he said, intended by this act of mercy to proclaim their desire to win the fair lady's homage. He even tried to persuade Barbara to accept his ill-drawn conclusions, again warning her that he must insist on her offering honors to the gods. But the only reply made by the lady was a fervent protestation that she would abide forever in the faith of Christ.

Marcian now well understood that to win the resolute girl by gentle means was out of the question, and that other expedients must be resorted to. Calling upon two of the strongest of his guards, he commanded them to tear the prisoner's sides with iron combs.

The soldiers set about their work, and with their cruel instruments rent and tore her flesh. Then they applied burning torches to her wounded sides, and with a hammer gave her repeated blows on head.

Amid these sufferings the Saint could be heard to murmur:

“Good Jesus, thou seest the secrets of my heart, that in thee I have put my trust.”

And God gave her strength proportionate to her need.

Marcian was amazed at beholding such constancy on the part of the young girl, but encouraging himself with the thought of what a victory it would be for him to break her lofty spirit, he determined to have recourse to a new cruelty. The soldiers stood by, eager to catch the first expression of the thought they saw playing in the light of his evil eyes. But though they were men inured to deeds of cruelty, they could not but shrink from their task when the next command uttered by the Prefect's lips fell upon their ears.

Men in whom almost every spark of emotion is dead sometimes take fire from noble feeling, when an injured object becomes allied in their eyes with the person of the mother who gave them birth. Such were now the circumstances which awoke pity in the hearts of the soldiers : they had heard the voice of the Prefect commanding them to cut off the breasts of the Saint, and their better nature might well revolt at the thought of the dishonor they would do their own mothers, if they revered not in the person of another what in her they had deemed sacred. But this hesitation proved only momentary, for they dared not disobey. The pain that Barbara suffered was intense ; but she bore it all with fortitude, uttering no sigh. Only she asked our Lord for more courage and alacrity to suffer for his sweet sake :

“ Do not turn thy face away from me, O Lord,” she prayed, “ and do not take thy holy spirit from me.”

Marcian was enraged at being thus worsted by a frail girl. Yet not even now would he confess himself vanquished. He persevered in the fancy that he could yet

compel Barbara to sacrifice to the gods.—What species of torment should he employ?

A new thought came most welcome to his mind. It occurred to him that if Barbara should see her modesty in peril, she might be brought to accept the terms he proposed. The longer he dwelt on this idea the better it seemed suited to his purpose, so he resolved to take measures to carry it out. A few moments sufficed for him to arrange his plan. He would have the Saint led naked through the thoroughfares of the city, and cruelly whipped along the way. If she would not then submit, he would give her into the hands of the executioner.

V.

WHEN this news was communicated by the soldiers to Barbara, with a resolute bearing she bade them do their master's will. Then with looks which showed the shame they felt at heart, the soldiers removed her dress, and leading her along the streets of the city, laid lash after lash from heavy whips upon her tender person. But though the martyr could endure the pain most bravely, she felt deeply the insult to her modesty. Lifting her eyes to heaven she murmured:

“My Lord, my King, who dost shroud the heavens with clouds, and the earth with night, Oh, shroud me now, I beseech thee, lest pagan eyes should look on me, and then blaspheme thy holy name.”

And lo, a wonderful splendor enveloped the maiden's form as with a robe, and shot forth a radiance that dazzled the sight, so that no eye durst look profanely on the martyr.

At last the soldiers returned with her to the court. As they entered the hall, Marcian saw at a glance that all his efforts had been in vain, and in a passionate voice he gave the sentence he had withheld so long,

“Let the executioner behead her!”

The word of condemnation was to Barbara like a solace to her sufferings. For this she had yearned; and it came all the more welcome because her waiting for it had been so long.

However, even at this moment, gladdened as she was by the thought of a speedy meeting with Him whom her soul loved, a final agony was in store for her, greater than all the others she had endured.

During her sufferings her father had stood by, exulting at each fresh torment that Marcian's ingenuity had devised. Now that he heard her death sentence spoken he could not contain his joy, and rushing forward to where Marcian sat, he begged the favor of being allowed to execute her with his own hand. His prayer was granted, and with a smile of triumph he followed the train of soldiers as they led out their prisoner.—This man of the tiger's heart was overjoyed at the thought that he was going to slay his own daughter!

The place of execution was on a hill outside the city. Around the summit soldiers were to stand on guard while the deed of blood was doing. Barbara greeted the life-giving spot with heartfelt thanks, and on reaching the brow of the hill, asked the grace of a few moments for prayer. Hard-hearted as they were, they could not do less than grant this simple favor. She then knelt down in the place destined to receive her warm life-blood, and prayed awhile with earnestness.

"Dear Lord," she said, "I thank thee for having made me steadfast till the end."

She then asked this favor of God : that he would graciously vouchsafe to bless those who should invoke him through her intercession. Thereupon a voice called to her from heaven :

"What thou dost ask for," it said, "shall be granted. Come, Bright Virgin, receive thy crown."

The soldiers saw by the motion of her head, which she now extended, that she was ready, and they beckoned to Dioscorus. He came forward sword in hand, and with a blow severed the head from her body. So passed the virgin martyr to her home. She had heard the Bridegroom calling: "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come."

For her the bleakness and the darkness of the winter was over and gone. She was to live in God's eternal sunshine now.

Saint Barbara's martyrdom took place during the persecution of Maximinus, on the fourth of December, in the year 306.

It happened that a devout lady by the name of Juliana had been a witness of the patience which Saint Barbara had shown under suffering. She had seen the miracle of her cure after the first day of her martyrdom, and she had seen too, the courage which heaven had given to the maiden's heart to endure more and more for Christ's dear sake. And Juliana was moved by Lady Barbara's example; she too longed to give her life for God. Her holy enthusiasm showed itself before the persecutors, and she was apprehended and put to the torture; then her breasts were cut off, and she had the happiness of being beheaded and receiving her crown in company with Saint Barbara.

God's justice overtook the unnatural father, Dioscorus, and the judge, Marcian, in a signal manner. As Dioscorus was returning home after Barbara's martyrdom in grim satisfaction at the revenge he had taken on his daughter, and the sacrifice he had made of her in honor of the gods, he was suddenly killed by a stroke of lightning. Marcian perished in the same manner.

The relics of Saint Barbara and Saint Juliana were conveyed from the scene of their martyrdom by Valentinian, a devout Christian, and interred with honor in a place called Gelasius, where great miracles were afterwards wrought through their intercession.

VI.

AMONG God's elect, Saint Barbara holds the blessed privilege of being the patroness of a happy death. Time and again, evidences of happy deaths and other graces obtained through her aid have been recorded.

The following account of a miracle wrought through Saint Barbara's intercession is related by Surius. The miracle took place in a town of Holland called Gorcum, in the year 1448.—A man whose name is given as Henry was very devout towards Saint Barbara. One night the house where he was lying asleep caught fire, and before he was conscious of the fact, the flames had surrounded and cut off every hope of escape. Poor Henry was not afraid of death, but he did not like to die without the sacraments, and he began to pray to his patroness, Saint Barbara, for help in his extremity. He had scarcely uttered his prayer, when Saint Barbara appeared through the flames; covering him with

her mantle, she led him to a place of safety. At the same time she made known to him that because of his devotion towards her, God had prolonged his life until the next day, so that he might receive the Holy Viaticum. The priest who visited the dying man and who vouches for the miracle, testified that the person was so burnt by the fire as hardly to resemble a human being, and that he died soon after receiving the sacraments.

Another instance of the care which Saint Barbara takes of those who are devout to her, is shown in the favor she granted to Saint Stanislas Kostka.

Stanislas from early youth had been a devout servant of Saint Barbara. He was fond of reading her life, and used to celebrate her feast with great fervor. The year before his entrance into the Society of Jesus (he was about fifteen at the time) he was at college in the city of Vienna. The feast of the blessed martyr was drawing near. Stanislas again read her life, and resolved to observe her feast with more devotion than ever before.

While reading the history of the Saint he observed that she had always obtained for her faithful servants the grace of not dying before receiving the Holy Viaticum. Stanislas dwelt with joy on the thought of this privilege of Saint Barbara, and he now begged of his dear patroness to grant him the same mark of her favor. Shortly afterwards he fell sick of a fever, and it was feared he would die. When he was told that there was little hope of his recovery, his joy for some moments knew no bounds. But soon a serious thought began to weigh upon his mind.—Was he to die without the Holy Viaticum ! There was some ground for this apprehension,

for the family in whose house he had his rooms was of the Lutheran sect, and the poor boy felt sure that a priest would be denied admittance. He mentioned the matter to his brother Paul and his tutor, and from both of them he received discouraging answers. Then he thought of Saint Barbara, who had brought the Sacred Host to others when they were in circumstances like his, and he implored her with tears to come to his aid. And she did not forget him. One night his tutor, while watching by the bedside of Stanislas, was surprised to see the saintly boy's face become bright all at once, and then assume a look of mingled gladness and reverence. This surprise was enhanced when Stanislas turned to him and whispered:

“Kneel and adore.—The Blessed Sacrament is here. Two angels of the Lord and the virgin martyr, Saint Barbara have brought it.”

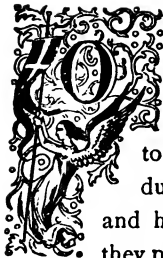
The story of this vision was afterwards related by the young nobleman's tutor. And Stanislas himself told it in confidence one day to a fellow-novice, when they were speaking together of the merits and prerogatives of Saint Barbara.

“Oh how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory ! for the memory thereof is immortal, because it is known both with God and with men.”



SAINT ZITA.

I.

NE evening towards the close of July, 1841, two pilgrims were on their way from the Church of Saint Pietro-a-Grado, near Pisa, to Saint Fredian's in Lucca. To avoid the dust of the highway they took a woodland path, and had just reached Mount Saint Julian, when they perceived a little chapel by the wayside. The walls, shattered by the storms of years, and the mortar, crumbling from the stones it had held together, were sufficient tokens of its being some relic of years long past. They came nearer to it, however, and on closer examination chanced to find an old marble slab with the letters of an inscription peeping out from the streaks of moss that almost hid it from view. On removing the moss and supplying some letters which time had well-nigh effaced, they read the words:

SANCTA · ZITA

ORA · PRO · NOBIS

At this moment a little village-girl drew near, and began to eye the strangers.

“My little girl,” one of them asked, “do you know who Saint Zita was? This shrine is hers, is it not?”

“I know who Saint Zita is,” she answered simply, “and this little house is built in her honor. There is a spring here near the door, and she often drank from it when returning from her pilgrimages. The sick are cured by drinking from this spring. I have come to get some of the water to take home to my little sister who is sick abed. She says Saint Zita will cure her. The Blessed Virgin appeared to Saint Zita in this place, and went home with her one cold winter’s night long ago. My mother teaches me and my sisters to call her our own good patroness, and the girls of the village often meet in the evening to sing their songs to her.”

Saying this the little girl turned away, and as she disappeared along the winding path which led to her home, the pilgrims heard her singing a hymn of praise to the Saint of her native mountains. The two strangers continued their journey, and when arrived at Lucca sought further details about the holy woman whose shrine they had met near Saint Julian’s. They soon learned who Zita was.

From the day of her death, which had taken place nearly five hundred years before this time, miracle after miracle had been wrought at her tomb, here sight had been restored to the blind, the lame and decrepit had been cured, and sorrowing mothers had beheld their children return to life. A long time after the Saint’s death, her body, so pure in life, was found wholly preserved from decay. A beautiful chapel was built in Lucca to hold her precious remains. The body was taken from the stone coffin in which it had lain,

and was placed under the altar of the newly-built church. In its new receptacle it was richly clothed in damask and gold, and about the head they bound a circlet of precious stones. The virginal hands, joined upon her breast, and the angelic face were alone exposed. Notwithstanding the time which had elapsed since her death, a sweet smile lingered about the sacred lips, as if death had surprised the Saint in some pleasant dream.

On each anniversary of her death Lucca arrayed itself in holiday attire. The windows were crowded with flowers, and in every Catholic family the children built little altars for the pictures of the Saint, and encircled them with gay festoons. At evening a flood of light was shed by lamps and waxen candles on the long line of little girls, who sang the praises of their patroness as they walked in procession to her shrines. Her panegyric was preached in all the churches of the city. Thousands flocked to hear that simple tale, for it differed from all others, and though simple, was sublime. And in truth, gentle reader, the life of our Virgin Patroness, whether amid the quiet of Mount Sagrati, or in the tumult of populous Lucca, presents wonders which ordinary life can never supply.

II.

ON Mount Sagrati stands a little cottage surrounded by the wild mountain ash and pine. Not far from its white walls, on the eastern side rises a green hillock. It is studied over with the fantastic towers and castles which children build and cast down, and build again, to cheat away the hours of evening. On the soft grass a little girl in frolic-

some mood skips with her young companions at play.—An innocent child, in her coarse frock that is so spotlessly clean, she needs not silks or satins to make an attractive picture. With the smile of perfect simplicity, so often on her lips, she is beautiful,

“Stainless without and innocent within.”

Such a smile no falseness of heart can simulate—indeed, no artist’s pencil can portray the smile which brightens the face of a little child. There is an artless burst of laughter which is heard neither in the palace of the king, nor in the halls of the noble, nor in city or country, save when a little child is there at play. With such a laugh does Zita bid good night to her young companions. The sun is no longer to be seen, except where his dazzling gold shines through the trees as he sinks into the sea beyond. This is a sign for her that she must hasten to her cottage home. An aged man bent with years of toil meets her at the garden gate, and tells her in kindly tones that her mother is awaiting her. Zita hurries to the arbor at the door of the cottage, kneels beside her mother, raises the dimpled palms to Heaven, and fixing her eyes on the blue expanse breathes forth her evening prayer.

Thus our Virgin Saint spent her younger days, known only to the groves of her native mountain. Soon she shall win a fame that shall never die. Hardly had she attained her twelfth year, when thinking she might be of more service to her parents if she were to earn something for herself and them, she asked her father to place her in the family of some wealthy gentleman. She urged that after a few years she would compensate for the many idle hours she had spent

in the little house on the hill-side. Her father felt that something more than natural impulse prompted the child's petition. He accordingly consented to her entering the service of a rich patrician family in Lucca.

The day appointed for her departure had at length arrived. Zita felt sad as she saw the moment come when she was to say farewell to her sunny home on the hill. No more was she to play on the grass, to hear the birds sing all day long, to pluck the berries that grew in the fissures of the rock, to breathe the mountain breeze, to lead a life of serenest joy. Her mother knew this full well, and pressing her little one to her bosom poured out, amid her falling tears, words of honey on the treasure of her soul.

"Farewell, my child! Mother may never see thee again. Yet she will often think of thee and pray for thee to God. Love and serve Him, for He will be to thee in the place of father and mother. While we are far away, He will take thy little hand, and lead thee up to Heaven. And there shall father and mother meet thee once more, and there shall we live—never again to be separated. Farewell! The blessing of God, and the blessing of thy mother be with thee, my child."

And the mother wept anew as she pressed her little one for the last time to her bosom, for she thought—how often perish the beauty and happiness of life when the child goes forth from home to the cold world of the stranger!

III.

IN the company of her father, Zita set out for the city. With unequal steps and with her tiny hand clasped in his,

she seemed to move along like a little thing whom God had chosen to perform a great work. She had left a halo of innocence around the wild woods of Sagrati, and now she went to render the mansion of Fatinelli memorable and glorious forever. When first he beheld this mountain flower, little thought the wealthy Signor that it was to be the only memento of his great family that should never fade away or die.

She was admitted among his household servants. What a wonderful change for the child of twelve years ! Yesterday she played on her free native hills and ate her frugal meal by the side of her father and mother—to-day she seems lonely and forsaken, and the dainty dishes of the city taste not so sweet as the fruit that grew in her father's garden. No more the solitude of a country home ! She looks around and sees a lordly mansion for her dwelling. Its doors are wide open all the day to receive lords and ladies and men of fame, who come to consult the learned magistrate. The girl of twelve wonders at the strangeness of the scene. She hears one speak of interest and discount, another of some vast speculation in business: one seems merry, another sad: one loiters in the hall-way, another walks hurriedly away.

“Oh !” she must have thought, “how sweet was my father's home ! how sweet the glories of the long summer's day ! how fragrant the flowers that clung to the brink of the steep ! how calm and bright the sky ! how refreshing the mountain breeze !” Thus indeed she may have thought, but she sat not down to weep over the memory of her Sion. She had a great fame to achieve; her praises were to be

spoken throughout all time; she was to become one of the "valiant women" of the Lord's following.

It is trial that proves the noble heart, and it is needless to say that trial and trouble cast their shadows on the path of Zita. But she strengthened her heart for heaven's high warfare, and arose brave like Judith to meet her foe.

One safeguard, she knew, was more available than the javelin or the quiver charged with poisoned darts, and that safeguard was the buckler of a stainless soul. This she purposed to preserve by the practice of frequent confession and communion. Every Saturday saw her at the feet of her ghostly father; every Sunday,—nay, not a morning passed that did not find her in the church praying before the altar of God. And often the people wondered at meeting a little girl on the coldest mornings in winter hurrying home from church, heedless of those she met, and reciting her rosary.

Zita began her day's work, by offering all her actions to the greater glory of God. She had been taught by her mother that her life should be one of continual prayer, and that such it could not be unless she did all for God, by giving the labor to her master, but her intention to God alone. Hence she asked the Almighty Father to bless the labor of her hands, invoked the assistance of her good Mother in Heaven, and recommended herself to Saint Joseph and her kind Angel Guardian.

Dressed in her frock and checkered apron, she begins her work. At different hours of the day we find her in the larder, kitchen and laundry. She performs her task with the greatest ease and pleasure. Her face is beaming with

smiles and her lips are moving in prayer. She seems to feel the presence of the Good Master, who will give her, as she knows, a reward exceeding great. She raises not her eyes from the work before her, except it be to turn them towards Him, to tell Him once more that for Him she polishes the pans, spreads the white shirts on the lea, or fetches the water from the well. Not only is every task pleasing to her, but besides doing what is enjoined, she shows herself most eager to do even more than her tender frame can support. What she undertakes is quickly done. It is finished with a care and taste that not unfrequently put to shame the negligence of maturer years.

No sort of task could ever hinder her from loving the beautiful Virtues, as she called them,—

“That sisterhood divine, brighter than stars,
And diverse more than stars, than gems, than blossoms.”

Poverty she loved as the precious treasure given her at her birth. She had often heard from her mother, that He whose coming was foretold by the Prophets and announced by Angels, came in the humble garb of poverty. It was for the poor that He had built that kingdom of whose joys and riches there is no end. So little Zita wished not for more than her own hands earned, and the small pittance she received at the end of the week or month was forwarded with care to the cottage on Mount Sagrati.

To say that she loved virginal purity would be to say too little. She so guarded the gates of her senses that nothing could enter her soul to deface the beauty of that angelic virtue. No companion could ever prevail upon her to lend an ear to any subject, unless it concerned God or her duty.

Though kind towards all, she would allow no one to make free with her. While she was employed in the laundry one day, a young man of the house made use of some unbecoming expressions and was approaching the little girl to lay hold of her. She snatched a piece of lattice-work from the table, and gave her amorous friend the first token of her love in the form of a highly-flushed cheek, then fled to her chamber, locked the door and left her first wooer on the outside to mourn over his fate. To slap a person's face may not seem high sanctity,—but who can fail to be moved with love and veneration for the lowly little handmaid doing battle for what her soul loved more than life?

We must say a word of her humility. One would hardly believe that little Zita could be so great a lover of so great a virtue. She never asked for a dress richer than the one she brought from her mother's home. She never blushed to be called the poor servant girl. The most humiliating task that the kitchen could afford was agreeable to her. Nor did she ever show herself disappointed if no word of merited praise came to soothe the soul bound down to such menial employments.

It was thus, gentle reader, that Zita prepared herself for temptation. Industry, prayer, humility and purity of heart were the friends she relied on most. They alone, she had once been told, would not desert her in the hour of need, but would call down the blessings of Heaven upon her soul. Her virtue stood above her like a mighty tree of the forest, large leaved and firm, and when the clouds of suffering and persecution burst in storm over her head and poured desolation around her, she rested happy and undismayed. Her

trials were indeed severe ones. She who was most exact in the performance of her duty could not escape the ill-will of fellow servants, who in her conduct saw their remissness put to the blush. They first tried to make her follow their example by frittering away her time in idle conversations. But finding her older in wisdom than in years, and "stiff-necked and stubborn," as they said, they poured out the vials of their indignation on her head.

She was represented to the Fatinellis as a little imp of wickedness—the very embodiment of all conceivable cunning—the veriest idler under their mistress' roof. The result of these calumnies was, that Madam Fatinelli lost all confidence in poor little Zita, and repayed her unflagging industry with looks of disdain. She imputed evil motives to the child, blamed her for what she did and blamed her for what she did not. Her husband, hasty and headstrong, yet good-hearted withal, suffered the poor child to see that he too had listened to the false reports about her—and the cold restraint of his manner caused her warm heart many a pang.

Irreligious people who had earthly motives for their actions, could not conceive it as possible that a little thing of Zita's frame and mind could have higher ends in view than they. Hence she had to suffer persecution from every quarter. Nor did these troubles cease after a week or a month: for several years her fellow-servants and employers waged this cruel war against her.

Moved, however, by the patient endurance of the child, and discovering something more than ordinary flesh and blood in that little frame, their prejudices were changed into the deepest admiration for her virtues. They began to make

her their pet, relieved her of every burden, and called her no longer a wretched little minx, but recognized her cheerful readiness. Signor Fatinelli soon opened his eyes, and began to detect more love of labor in her little finger than in the entire bodies of his other servants. The mistress of the family, too, discerned in the person of the mountain girl an object well worthy of love. The servants of the house owned her their superior, and paid her a respect well earned by a life of virtue.

IV.

THUS the stream which had flowed gently for so many years was fretted for a while; but having passed the rocks that chafed its course, the current of Zita's life once more sped on silent and serene. Heaven smiled on her, and the sunshine of success irradiated all she did. God in requital of her unflinching allegiance to Heaven notwithstanding the hindrance of an earthly master, rewarded his little handmaid with many signal favors.

One day an old woman came to the gate to ask for charity. Zita hurried off to procure an alms and had soon filled her apron with several slices of bread. She was on the point of re-entering the court-yard, when Signor Fatinelli met her. He looked fierce, and with a stern voice demanded of her what it was she was taking out of the house. A flush of pain for a moment colored the Saint's countenance, not so much because she feared an angry outbreak, as that she dreaded being debarred from performing her act of charity. At the Signor's bidding however, she opened her apron, and to her own surprise and her master's satisfaction, it was found to be full of most beautiful flowers.

He nodded his head and passed on. Zita hastened towards the poor woman, and when she now opened her apron the flowers were bread again.

Another day having been charged with the making of some pastry for the family breakfast, she rose very early so as to hear mass and return in time for the pastry-making. While at church such consolation flooded her soul that the time passed by very rapidly. When, after finishing her prayer, she reached the street, the day was well advanced and the sun was near the breakfast meridian. She thought of her pastry—how the old gentleman would storm, how the young ones would dance for their breakfast! She hastened home as speedily as possible, and on her arrival found the pastry exquisitely done, as delicious a thing as appetite could wish, and ready to be put upon the table. She asked by whom it had been baked. The answer was—no one had seen or heard of it since she had left the house.

It cannot be wondered at, that one who enjoyed these manifest favors of Heaven should gain a place of esteem and love in the hearts and minds of all. The day of her exaltation had come, and she who had been last among the servants was now to be first. But as in early youth, when she knew no sorrow, she had prepared her soul for the day of trial, so, during the time of suffering which had just gone by, she had fortified herself for the day of prosperity.

One evening the Signor called her to his room and committed to her direction all the work of the house. Thenceforth she was to assign their various duties to the servants. Locks and keys were under her control, and no domestic had the least management of affairs unless it was given her

by Zita. Strange to say, this high promotion did not excite any feelings of jealousy in the older servants. On the contrary, they seemed more pleased with having a kind young mistress over them than an old one who might easily be less kind. The first thing Zita did was to exhort them to frequent the Sacraments and lead truly Christian lives. And not only on them, but on all who came within her sphere, did the Virgin Saint shed the sweet influence of her holiness. Even the old Signor, who was not remarkable for his fervor as a Christian, felt urged by her bright example to a higher love of duty. Despite his rigid economy, she obtained permission from him to distribute daily a certain amount of provisions to the poor of the city. Notwithstanding her many acts of charity, he saw the inner state of his house prosper from day to day under her stewardship. In fact nothing ever went wrong in her hands.

At this time a famine fell upon the citizens of Lucca. The poor thronged for assistance to the gates of the wealthy, and finding more than an ordinary friend in the person of Zita, they flocked in greater numbers to Signor Fatinelli's mansion. Thus it came to pass that her quota of beans one day gave out, before half her clients were supplied. In her charity, she began to draw upon the contents of a large sack which the Signor had set apart for other purposes. These she distributed till all were supplied. That evening the Signor bade her see that the sack of beans was in readiness, as he had found a purchaser for them. Alas for poor Zita and the pillaged sack ! She went however to the store-room to get ready whatever might be left of the beans, and to her surprise found the sack full to overflowing.

She loved the poor exceedingly, and little children she cherished as her brothers. She asked the Lady Fatinelli to give her charge of those in the family. Her request was granted—For her mistress seeing the saintly virtue of the young girl, deemed her a most fitting person to train up the young and innocent in the way of God's service. Many important offices had been committed to Zita of late, but she prized this as the nearest and the dearest to her heart. She showed the children an example of perfect care in the performance of duty, and of tender consideration for the feelings of others. Her life was like an open book written in large characters, from which her little charges could read the lesson of love for the good, and hatred for all that was perverse. Not from holy lips like hers could a hasty or profane word fall to scandalize these little ones. She whose life was one of innocence and gentleness, spoke to them either of the things of God, or of what it beseemed them to know regarding themselves and others.

Neither was her piety of that dry kind which rather withers devotion, than causes it to bud and blossom into fruit. At night she took her little ones to the piazza that overlooked the garden. From there she would show them the heavens studded with stars, which in her simplicity she called the eyes of the angelic choir looking down on peaceful souls. She would point to the moon's unclouded splendor, and then tell them how that fair queen of the skies was like the Queen of Heaven, who outshines the Angels and the Saints in glory. Next she would show them some mass of clouds that hung over the mountains, and noticing its "beautiful semblance to a flock at rest," she would tell them of

how the Blessed calmly repose from their labors on the peace-kissed hills of Sion. Then she would point to the little pond that lay in the centre of the garden, and show them how the stars so high above seemed to twinkle in the mirroring waters. "Thus," she used to say, "you shall one day see those same stars, my children, not in a mirror, but in reality beneath your feet.—And if the outside of the heavens be so beautiful, what must their fairness be within!" And if perchance from some neighboring tower a strain of music came floating to the balcony where Zita and her little ones sat, thinking of that angelic choir above,

"Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted, angel-trumpets blow,
And the Cherubic host in thousand choirs
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,
Singing everlastingly,"

she would tell them of the white-robed virgins and the chant they sing before the Lamb. And the children as she spoke would raise their eyes to Heaven and clap their hands and feel their little bosoms swell with joy. Then she took them to their rooms, and taught them to praise Him whose glory they had been witnessing. This was true happiness to Zita, for well she knew that the prayers of the innocent ascend to the throne of God more sweet than the fragrance of incense. She was also fond of enlivening the children, now and then, with some interesting narrative; and such was the charm with which she told her pious stories, that the children would leave their play and cling about her. They advanced in years and in wisdom, and when she had gone forth from amongst them, they rose up and called her blessed.

Zita was loved not only by all the members of the Fatinelli family, but by every household in the city. Her virtue had won her a nobler name than any which birth or titles of nobility can confer. She was also known for many leagues outside of Lucca by reason of her long and frequent pilgrimages. During these journeys in which she would often employ the greater part of the night, a wonderful lady used to accompany her for many miles on the road.

Once she was returning from a very distant shrine of devotion. Night overtook her on the way. It was almost impossible for a human being to advance any further. Zita had knelt down by the roadside to recommend herself to the protection of Heaven. She felt a gentle touch on the shoulder and heard a lady's voice saying, "Come with me to Lucca." Zita said it was too dark; that the gates of the city were shut, and that it was more prudent to remain under the protection of some tree till morning. "Have no fear," said the Lady,— "let us go together to Lucca." Zita felt reassured, and started at once with her companion. When they came to the city walls, the gates were thrown open by invisible hands. They walked safely through the city, and on reaching the door of the Fatinelli house, the Lady turned to Zita saying, "Be of good heart, love my Son and He and I will love thee." Before Zita could reply, the Lady had vanished in a flood of light.

V.

ZITA was a favorite daughter of Heaven, and Heaven protected her. Though she had endeared herself to all around her on earth, her best friendship was with those who live

beyond the stars. It may seem strange that a servant girl should so easily get permission to absent herself from home. But this only goes to show how kind and thoughtful masters and mistresses become, when they have a faithful servant to deal with. Zita's piety was real. She was willing to be blamed—she was ready to forgive. She showed as much alacrity in performing an irksome task, as in laying it aside at her mistress' word. Nor did the Signor's interest suffer any loss by reason of her extreme piety. The truth of this is borne out by the following instance.

Our holy virgin could never be prevailed upon to wear any dress but the poorest.—One cold, rainy morning, the Signor met her at the door as she was going to mass. Seeing how poorly she was protected from the weather he made her take his own cloak, telling her at the same time to bring it home safe. While on her way to the church, she met an old man shivering with cold. She threw the cloak around his shoulders, and told him that she would need it on her way back. She went to church, and at the corner of the street on her way home, looked about for the old man, but neither the old man nor the cloak was there any longer. The cloak was well worth the stealing. There was nothing for it but to return and front her master's anger. Home she came and told the old gentleman of her charity's untoward result. He could not of course remember any Gospel text that commands one to entrust his goods to a rogue, even for an hour, and he talked and raved the livelong day about that stolen cloak. Zita said not a word. This time surely she was guilty. Well, towards evening, a gentle knock was heard at the door. In walked an aged man with the cloak thrown

over his shoulders. The Signor in his hatred for all rogues was just going to rate the mendicant roundly, when the old man handed him back the missing cloak, bowed to Zita, and walked out the door, with a halo of light encircling his head. It was none other than the Holy Spouse of the Virgin Mary.

Such wonders as these might have sown in Zita's soul a feeling of pride, had not humility already grown by grace to be like a portion of her nature. She had a smile for all, and a kind word as well, and showed by every look and gesture that the more she was exalted before men the more she humbled herself before God.

It was April, 1278. Our Saint was now well advanced in years. She was naturally of a delicate frame and severe fasts, long vigils and uninterrupted labor had wasted her strength. But old age did not make her less exact in her daily practices of devotion. She never drew back for a moment from the life of dependence that was her lot, nor did she tire of the life of sanctity which she herself had chosen. How beautiful would be that soul if God would now take it to himself! How happy now would Zita be, if she could hear the voice of her Beloved calling to her from the hills of Sion!

VI.

TOWARDS the end of the above mentioned month, on a Saturday evening, a young man entered the city of Lucca, and soon found his way to the mansion of Fatinelli. There he met the Signor and asked him if he had not a person named Zita among his household servants. "I passed through here," he added "some ten years ago, and never

have I forgotten the kindness with which your servant treated me. I was leading a life of sin. She spoke a word which sank deeply into my heart. I sought for mercy and found it. Now I come from my mountain solitude, for from my cavern in the rock last night I heard sweet music like the voices of many Angels. I looked and beheld ascending on high a band of lily-white virgins, with a fair, shining form like that of Zita in their midst. Let me know where she is, that I may tell her this tale of joy."

"Where is she?"—repeated the Signor, with a tear coursing down his furrowed cheek. "Ah me! she stood beside me like a graceful tree of the forest. My young ones clung around her, and me she shielded from the blast. Now I stand lonely and deserted. Farewell, Zita! thy master shall never speak harsh word to thee more."

And sadly the old man turned, and calling a little boy from the street, bade him take the stranger to the place where Zita rested. When they left the door of Fatinelli the stranger turned to his young guide and asked him where Zita was, and what sort of rest the Signor referred to. The little boy began to weep.

"Oh, sir!" he sobbed out, "our good Zita is dead. Our good mother Zita has gone away from us to Heaven. Last evening we heard that she was dying. And oh, sir! if you were to see how all the little girls and boys of the city gathered around the door of the mansion and wept, and cried for her not to die. She was kind to us, she gave us clothes, and gave us money, and often gathered us all together and gave us food. At her death all the rich ladies of the city thronged to her bedside, for not only did the

poor love her, but the well-dressed people too. Every one was trying to get a keepsake from her, and asking her to pray for them when she should be high up near God. Those who were near her did not know when she died, for she joined her hands, closed her eyes and seemed to fall asleep. And so she did, but only with her body; her soul went far away up to Heaven. At the very moment she died, a large star, bigger than the moon, came shining out of a cloud and hung over the city. All the people came into the street and looked up at it and wondered. And I heard one man say, that it was the soul of Zita that waited for a moment, to show us how bright and happy she was."

"Here," added the boy, "is the Church of Saint Fredrian—Zita was always fond of coming to this Church."

The stranger entered and found the altars draped in mourning; and the aisles were crowded with the richest families of the city. Every face looked sad, every heart seemed sorrowing. The stranger made his way forward to the altar-railings. There before the tabernacle lay dressed in black, his soul's benefactress—Holy Zita, the handmaid of God.

She had died in the fulness of years and sanctity. During the brief period of sickness which preceded her departure from this life, she had foretold the very day of her death. For upward of two score years she had looked forward to that blissful day. When at length it came, it found her clad in the nuptial garment with her lamp trimmed and ready to meet the Bridegroom. She heard His voice. She bade farewell to her friends; closed her eyes on the days of the flesh; and amid the perfume of holiness went forth to meet her Saviour.

Zita rose above the horizon of poor human nature more beautiful than the morning star. But the splendor which adorned her rising, and which grew brighter as the hours of life advanced, was but a glimmering of the unspeakable glory which encircled that soul as it sank into the sun-lit ocean of eternity. She will rise again to throw a halo of heavenly light around the humble station from which brightness everlasting came to her. And wherever the lowly form of the servant girl moves, there is shed the brightest ray of Zita's glory, for there is the dearest object of her care.

Thus far, gentle reader, we have followed Zita; farther we cannot go. We saw how great was the fame of the holy woman whose shrine and fountain in the woods, the little village-girl so simply described; then for a moment we went back to Mount Sagrati, and then to Lucca, and wherever we stopped to gaze, the wonders of a wonderful life met our view. Still in that life remain many fair pictures, to be drawn by the hand of a pious chronicler. Many of the great deeds and sufferings that she underwent for Christ are little known to us. Yet there is one who knows her works and labor and patience, "how she bore the toil of the day, and for His Name's sake labored and fainted not." The deeds of holy souls may be blotted out from the history of men, but not from the Book of Life;—for "blessed are they who die in the Lord that they may rest from their labors. Their works do follow them—and their path is as the light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

SAINT CECILIA.

I.



SAINT CECILIA, the patroness of sacred music and song, belonged to one of the most illustrious families of Rome. The great dignities of the old republic, as well as the high appointments of the mighty empire during the brilliant age of Augustus, belonged to her ancestors; and the triumph and renown of her name had preceded her by hundreds of years. Consuls, censors, dictators; conquerors of Macedon, Numidia, Dalmatia and the Balearic Isles had won glory for the name which she was to bear and which she was to consecrate with still greater glory to Christ and to Virginity.

Already Rome had honored a Cecilia in the person of her who was the wife of Tarquin the Elder, because in her character of princess she had not forgotten the home duties of her sex, and did not fail to accomplish the useful while she enjoyed the beautiful. A statue was erected to her honor, and her distaff and spindle were carefully preserved as heirlooms of precious worth, while the garment which she wove for Servius Tullius was placed in the very temple of

Fortune. Even Saint Jerome praises her as an example of modesty among the Gentiles, and says that while the glory of her husband is forgotten, her superior qualities of womanhood will always endure to her honor and praise.

But it was reserved to our Saint to win triumphs more substantial far than any praise of people or province, and to perpetuate them throughout the Christian world until the end of time. The glory which came to her from her ancestors, she held of little account. The wealth which she prized she did not inherit; and the crown she wore, she won. Her high estate in social life makes her, perhaps, more admirable in our eyes; but our eyes may be somewhat worldly, and our desire of spiritual wealth somewhat divided with a desire for the wealth of the world. But with her it was not so. Her eyes looked upon all things in the light of faith, and her love appreciated them in proportion as they were spiritual and holy. To be the virgin bride of Christ was the only ambition of her life.

Saint Cecilia was born in Rome in the beginning of the 3rd century and during the years of comparative peace which followed upon the death of Septimius Severus. Tradition says that the house in which she spent her childhood was on the Campus Martius. At all events, a church bearing her name was built on the spot at a very early period, and when in the last century it was rebuilt, an old inscription was taken from it and engraved upon the new edifice which now stands in its stead. It reads as follows: "This is the house where Saint Cecilia prayed." The church is called "the church of divine love," and truly it merits the name if it covers the spot where she said so many loving prayers.

II.

How or by what means our Divine Lord first took possession of her young heart can be determined with no accuracy; but it is certain that he did so in her infancy, and that her earliest childhood, though spent in a pagan home, was passed in all the purity of Christian life. The Christians at the time were multiplying rapidly in Rome, and it is not improbable that some of the servants of her mother's wide household first instructed her in the sacred truths, and watched over her with loving care. Possibly, too, from indifference to what might be thought the whim and fancy of a child, she was allowed to cultivate the germs of faith till they took deep root, while the Holy Spirit taught her to make use of His gifts of prudence and counsel, as later He strengthened her in her fortitude.

However this may be, she was soon well known to the Pope, Saint Urban, and was thought by him a very angel of mercy because of her charity to the poor. Though the holy Pontiff lived in constant expectation of martyrdom, and was obliged to conceal his whereabouts from all but a few trusty friends, Cecilia was always in communication with him, and drew from him, doubtless, many lessons in Christian doctrine, as well as many examples in Christian piety.

She heard Mass regularly wherever the faithful could gather, and she was one of the most devout in her visits to the tombs of the martyrs that lay buried all along either side of the Appian way.

In such an atmosphere of holiness, a holiness sealed with so much blood, it is no wonder that even in her child-

hood her heart began to grow brave and her ambition to reach after the highest of heavenly crowns. Kneeling day by day at some martyr's shrine, recalling the history of his glorious life and death, and remembering that he gave them precisely for the same gospel which then and there she wore hidden beneath her garments and pressed to her bosom; conversing at times in his silent retreat with the venerable pontiff, and learning from his lips some tradition of Apostolic times, or the life and labors of some martyr who had bled and died for the faith; dispensing her charities to the poor by supplying them from her own store of plenty with food and raiment;—all this could not but prepare her mind and heart for those heavenly interviews with which her divine Master so favored her, and for those moments of ecstasy which she enjoyed in the silence of her chamber while in prayer she kept the watches of the night.

But withal, her girlhood was passed in comparative peace.

If any thought her conduct strange, no one dared to enter a charge against the favorite of the house of the Ceciliæ. Her trial and her crown were reserved for her young womanhood. Whether or not, like others, she received the veil of virginity from the hand of the saintly pontiff and uttered her vow in his presence; she certainly received a special protection from Heaven and the assurance that her hope of living and dying a virgin should be in the fullest sense fulfilled. The Divine Spouse would defend the bride who had so well fitted herself for Him, and He would give her an angel that would watch over her and shield her from harm.

III.

WITH riper years the danger at last came. She had been, in her beauty and accomplishments, the pride of the pagan home circle, just as in her piety and purity of life she had been the pride of the poor Christians; and now her parents would see that her worth was appreciated and her merit rewarded. Her alliance should be an illustrious one. Some noble patrician should have her hand in marriage; some scion of Roman royalty with wealth and station should be her bridegroom.

Such a one was found in the person of Valerian. He was of noble birth and of handsome features, and of a great and generous nature. Thus far in life the only love of his heart had been a most ingenuous and devoted affection for his brother, Tiburtius, who had not, perhaps, so successfully escaped the influence of pagan thought, but who had risen above the licentiousness of pagan manners, and reciprocated his brother's love with a love equally undefiled. Together they were wont to while away the idle hours which the leisure of affluence gave them, together they shared their secrets, and built up their prospects, and it is not strange that so serious a step as that which Valerian now meditated should be a matter of deepest interest to the heart of Tiburtius. Little did he dream, though, how very deep it would prove in the end.

Cecilia, on hearing of the engagement made for her was filled with anguish. She could love and cherish Valerian as her brother, she could admire his high spirit and noble bearing, and perhaps, of all men that could have been presented to her, he would have been her favorite; but she

could not give him that love which a bridegroom has a right to claim, and she shrank from obligations which she knew she could not fulfil.

At the same time, resistance would be of no avail. Her parents would not listen to her pleading. They had deliberated long, and as they thought, well; they were conscious that no motive but that of love for their child and the glory of their house had urged them on; and they were conscious, too, that they had secured for their daughter the most eligible of Rome's proud patricians. With such a frame of mind and heart the event to them seemed a triumph.

Cecilia was now betrothed and the wedding-day was near at hand. She felt that she could not thwart their purpose, but she could prepare for the worst, and leave the rest to the care of her Divine Bridegroom. Her prayers were multiplied and her fastings and watchings prolonged, and under her magnificent dress, embroidered with gold, she wore a garment made of coarsest hair that her body might be the more mortified, and her soul prepared for greater trials.

IV.

AT last the wedding-day is at hand. The palace of the Cecillii is brilliant with illumination, and lines of light fall along the Appian way where throngs of plebeians are gathered to catch a glimpse of the bridal pair, and royalty moves to and fro in chariots of gold.

Two great families are to be united and to transmit to posterity the social and political pride of hundreds of years. Valerian, the proud patrician, is in the full flush of his triumph. Always handsome and accomplished, he never

seemed so brilliant before. Friends gather around him to give him greeting, and he receives them like one whose wealth cannot be counted, whose generosity knows no bounds, and whose honors cannot be increased.

But all eyes are turned from him when the bride is led forward, for she is his greatest wealth and greatest honor. Her nuptial dress is a tunic of simple white, fastened with a single girdle of the same color, in glorious remembrance of the robe woven by Caia Cecilia the pride of all the Ceciliæ. Her hair is done in imitation of the head-dress which the Vestals wear, while over her face falls a long flame-colored veil which hides her features from the gaze of all.

For the first time she is compelled to take part in pagan ceremonies, but her heart is firm and calm and she knows that the Angel which Heaven gave for her protector is by her side. The offering of sacrifice is made and she quietly turns away her eyes from the scene, the bridal cake is broken, and the hand of Cecilia is placed in the hand of Valerian. All is accomplished in the eyes of man, and the bride of Christ seems to be the bride of another.

The wedding was over, and Cecilia was conducted, as was the custom, to the house of her husband at sunset. Valerian received her under the large portico which formed the entrance to his palace, and which was now decorated with tapestry and festooned with leaves and flowers of every color. He saluted her according to the ancient rite with the question: "Who art thou?" According to the same rite she answered: "Where thou art Caius, I will be Caia!"—a formula which again reminded the bridegroom of what

a prize he had won, for it was nothing more than the traditional and universal acknowledgment on the part of the Romans, that no man could hope for more in the marriage-tie than a wife who would aspire to be like Caia Cecilia, the bride of the Tarquin, whose very offspring he himself was now fortunate enough to wed.

Cecilia then entered the house; and water was presented to her as an emblem of the purity with which she should be adorned. A key, too, was placed in her hands, as a symbol of domestic administration confided henceforth to her care; and finally she seated herself for a moment upon a fleece, to remind her that she must not shrink from the labors of the household.

After these preliminaries the bridal party passed into the banquet hall where supper was served. During the banquet a nuptial song was sung and bands of music made the hall reëcho with harmonies. Cecilia also sang, but with the voice of the heart, and her melody was so united to that of the angels, so divine in its words and so heavenly in its music, that the Church has styled her the Queen of Song.

Every year on the day of her triumph her song is repeated throughout the world in her honor, "May my heart and my senses remain always pure, O my God! And may my chastity be preserved inviolable!"

V.

WHEN they were alone Cecilia said to Valerian:

"My noble and generous friend, I have a secret to tell you, but you must swear that you will treat it with full respect and perfect observance;—will you?" Valerian assured

her that she might command him, that her secret thoughts would always be dear to him, and that he would keep them at the cost of his life. Whereupon she continued:

“You must know that I am in the care of an angel whom God has given me to be the protector of my virginity. If you slight his mission in the least, his vengeance will strike you dead; but if he see that you love me as he does, and help to preserve me as the bride of Christ, he will love you just as he loves me, and he will show you his own beauty!”

“I shall not betray your confidence, Cecilia,” answered Valerian, wondering at the announcement, “but if you wish me to believe so strange a story, you must let me see this angel. If I recognize him as an angel of God, I will do what you ask; but if he prove to be only man like myself, I will destroy both him and you with my sword!”

“Then follow my advice,” said the Virgin, “and be purified by the waters of eternal life, and believe in the one, true, living and only God who reigns in Heaven, and I promise you that you shall see my angel!”

Valerian enquired how all this was to be effected, and where and when he was to enjoy this vision; and Cecilia told him to go out of the city at once by the Appian way as far as the third mile-stone. There he would find some poor people who were wont to ask alms of the passers by. They were, she said, the objects of her constant care and were in full possession of her secret.—He was to give them her blessing, and say that Cecilia sent him to them that they might conduct him to the holy old man, Urban, as the bearer of a private message from her. When introduced

into the presence of this venerable man, all that she had said should be repeated, and on hearing it, he would purify Valerian and clothe him in white garments, and her angel would greet him with affection on his return.

Before the dawn Valerian was with Urban in his hidden retreat. All had passed as Cecilia had foretold; and when the stranger had explained his presence, the venerable Pontiff fell upon his knees and with eyes raised to Heaven, exclaimed:

“Lord Jesus Christ, author of chaste resolves, receive the fruit of the divine seed which thou hast sown in the heart of Cecilia. O good Shepherd! Cecilia, thy servant, like an innocent lamb has fulfilled the mission thou hast confided to her. In a moment she has transformed her husband from an impetuous lion into a gentle lamb. If Valerian did not already believe, he would not be here. Open, O Lord, the ear of his heart to thy words, that he may acknowledge thee, his Creator, and that he may forever renounce the devil, his pomps and his idols!”

VI.

CECILIA had conquered; and the first trophy of her victory was the heart of her husband offered to the Saviour of the world. Clothed in the white robes of the neophyte which he had just assumed, he reached the door of her chamber and there beheld her prostrate in prayer, and by her side the Angel of the Lord, his face resplendent with light, and his wings brilliant with colors. The blessed spirit held in his hand two crowns interwoven with roses and lilies, one of which he placed upon the brow of Cecilia, the other upon that of Valerian, saying to them:

“Merit these crowns by the purity of your hearts, and the sanctity of your lives. I bring them fresh from Heaven. They will not fade nor lose their fragrance; but no one can see them, who has not, like you, endeared himself to Heaven by virginal purity. And now, Valerian, as a reward for thy acquiescence in the chaste desires of Cecilia, Christ has sent me to thee to receive any request thou dost wish to make him.”

Valerian threw himself at the feet of the angel, assured him that nothing was so precious to him as the affection of his brother, and begged that the grace which he had received might be likewise bestowed upon Tiburtius. The heavenly messenger told him that his prayer was heard, and more, that both he and his brother should receive the palm of martyrdom.

The Angel ascended to Heaven, and Cecilia and Valerian, transported with happiness, were encouraging each other to merit the crowns just given them, when in the midst of their conversation Tiburtius entered and interrupted them.

As he saluted Cecilia, he perceived a sweet perfume of roses and lilies issuing from her hair, and on asking what it meant, Valerian explained all that had happened, and told him that if he would only believe and be purified he could even see the flowers whence the perfume came.

“Yea!” he cried, “and thou canst see the angel that wove them, if thou will only be cleansed from the stain of idolatry! Only swear to me that thou dost renounce the idols and acknowledge one only and true God in Heaven! There is no deceit—the gods we have adored are but devils!”

Cecilia, who had remained silent the while, here came to the support of Valerian, and being well instructed in the faith, gave Tiburtius the arguments which had been used against the idols by the prophets and the martyrs. Her success was so complete that he yielded his entire assent, which so rejoiced the heart of the Virgin that she exclaimed:

“Oh! I acknowledge thee as my brother indeed. The love of Christ has made Valerian my husband, and thy contempt for idols makes me truly thy sister!” Go with Valerian and be purified, and then thou shalt see the Angel!”

The marvels of divine grace were wrought in the soul of Tiburtius just as they had been in that of his brother, and now the happy three were united by one bond, and became strengthened in their love every day. Their home was the pride of the Christians in Rome. Cecilia was no longer shrinking timidly from a pagan husband; she stood firm and proud by the side of one who she knew would die a Christian martyr. The thought gave her renewed strength. Without laying aside the elegance of her station, she was more mortified and prayerful than ever; her charities were scattered even more generously, and with greater independence. What had she now to hope for or to fear? God’s love had crowned her work, and she sighed only that her life might be crowned with the glory of martyrdom. And the glory soon came.

VII.

THE emperor Alexander was with his armies in the East, and his prefect, Almachius, ruled the city. The hatred of this man for the Christians was beyond bounds. Without

authority and without provocation he instituted a persecution which in cruelty, was never surpassed. It was directed chiefly against the Christians of the lower and poorer walks of life, and thousands of them were tortured and mangled till the streets of the city ran blood.

To be more inhuman still, he forbade that any one should bury the bodies of the martyrs or pay respect to their memory. This was the decree that gave Cecilia and her converts their crown. Valerian and Tiburtius despised such a law, and spent their wealth and their time in burying the sacred remains, till at last they were arrested and led before the tribunal.

Almachius censured them severely for their conduct, but they replied with great spirit, until they so far committed themselves as to insult the imperial dignity, and profess Christianity in the very face of the Roman prefect. They would burn no incense to idols and would take no part in pagan sacrifices. They were, accordingly scourged with rods and then condemned to death.

The place named for their execution was a temple of Jupiter near the fourth mile-stone on the Appian way, whither they were hurried without a moment for farewell to the virgin whom they both loved so dearly. She had not seen them during their trial, but her prayers were with them, and were heard. The faithful secured the bodies of the two brothers and brought them to Cecilia and she anointed them with the richest perfumes, and buried them herself by the second mile-stone and erected a tomb over them on which were engraved a palm leaf and a crown.

The prefect would have confiscated the property of Valerian

and Tiburtius, but Cecilia forestalled him by distributing all their possessions among the poor. Indeed, she was now so outspoken and so triumphant in her joy over Christ's conquest that she feared nothing which could befall.

She was of noble birth, she was of the Cecillii, she was the angel of the poor, she was a Christian, and most of all she was the virgin widow of a virgin martyr!—why should she fear a pagan prefect of pagan Rome? Almachius knew that it were better for him, both in the eyes of the absent Emperor and those of the populace, to have some regard for her nobility, and so he sent officials to her house requiring her to sacrifice to the gods privately.

But instead of sacrificing to idols, she converted the envoys, and delayed her prosecution till they were baptized. Saint Urban himself performed the ceremonies in her house, and at the same time conferred the holy sacrament upon four hundred others. Cecilia then made over to some of the converts all her wealth and went forth to meet the prefect.

Cowed by her noble presence Almachius pretended to ignore her birth and asked her name.

“Men” said she, “call me Cecilia, but my more beautiful name is Christian!”

Her cool and calm demeanor in the presence of this monster, her quick and sprightly repartee, her lucid explanation of Christian doctrine and her beautiful Christian heroism, make up some of the most charming pages in all the acts of the Martyrs. Her intelligence always kept pace with her devotion; her humility was always full of courage and her manner full of modesty. Her last words in the

presence of the judge were an eloquent denunciation of idolatry, and a stinging rebuke to his injustice. But she was now to be set free from the disgust of the one, and the insolence of the other.

VIII.

THOUGH Almachius had great fear of a tumult among the people, he had no solicitude for the virgin's life. He hesitated to have her executed in public, but in the quiet bath-room of her palace his vengeance could be wreaked to the full. She should be suffocated in her own home. The reservoirs of boiling water which supplied vapor for the vapor-baths should be kept at the highest gauge, and the furnace whose pipes warmed the room to fever heat, should be fed till the heat became suffocation.

But all this failed. Cecilia entered the bath-room and remained there all night and many hours of the day; but there was not even a moisture on her forehead, not even a flush on her cheek. Finally an officer of Almachius entered, sword in hand; and as Cecilia beheld him, she walked proudly forward and bowed down her head for execution. The hireling struck three times, but his awkwardness and excitement left his work imperfect, and as he was forbidden by law to strike again, he fled away, leaving the virgin lying bathed in her blood.

At once her loved ones—the poor whom she had fed and clothed, and the neophytes whom she had converted—gathered around her to watch her smiles in the agonies of death, and dip their linen cloths in the virgin martyr's blood. They watched and waited, but she would not die. She had prayed to live till the coming of another. And he came. His head

was bowed with grief and age and his eyes were filled with tears. No one on earth knew, like him, the deep meaning and the priceless worth of the life now passing away. He had seen it in its first bloom, watched it in its growth, and gathered its fruits. The holy Pontiff knelt over his dying child, the very pride and glory of his pontificate even unto this day, and received her last will and testament. With eyes full of triumph she said to him:

“O my father! I have asked this delay only that I might leave to you my treasure and my love—my poor! They will so miss me when I am gone! In thy hands they will be safe; keep them and feed them for me!”

And as the aged Urban lifted his hand to give his blessing she turned her head so that her face was downward as if buried in her arm and hidden; her right hand was pressed to her heart, and her left lay free by her side. She remained thus, motionless, for a while, and they knew that she was dead.

In this same attitude, and in the same robes of silk and gold all moistened with blood, Saint Urban and the mourners laid her in a cypress coffin, and placed the linen cloths at her feet; and on the following night they buried her on the Appian Way near the third mile-stone, almost opposite the graves of Valerian and Tiburtius. It was in the enclosure reserved for the tombs of the Pontiffs, and the place was called the cemetery of Saint Callixtus; but it was in a retired spot and apart, so that she might be as near as possible to the graves of her husband and his brother.

Saint Urban soon followed Cecilia to Heaven, as did so many other glorious martyrs who had known and loved her.

Indeed her life and influence were so active and widespread that her biography might almost be called the history of Christianity in Rome while she lived. This simple sketch is but the merest outline; but it will serve, albeit imperfectly, to give some idea of what virginity could accomplish even in the third century, and even in the high places of the world's debauched capital.

Her life was short but full; and all its good things came to her because of her virginity. In her practice of the faith she was a confessor; in her propagation of that faith, the field of her apostolate was so wide that she might be called an apostle, and among the successors of the Apostles was she buried; and martyrdom was the crown of her life, the noblest gift of all, and the one which she longed for from childhood: but this, like all the others, began with virginity and was based upon it, and so whatever may be the number of her crowns in Heaven, we cannot but think of them all as only so many rays of greater glory reflected from her crown of Virgin.



SAINT TERESA.

I.



SAINT TERESA was born in the city of Avila, in Old Castile, on Wednesday the 28th of March, 1515. Her parents were Don Alfonso Sanchez de Cepeda, and Donna Beatrix Davila y Ahumada, both of high Castilian descent, and not less distinguished for their virtues than for their noble birth.

Alfonso Sanchez was a fair type of the Christian nobleman. He was charitable to the poor, a kind and generous master to his servants and dependants. The deep interest he felt in the eternal welfare of his children made him anxious to give them, in his own conduct, an example which they could follow without doing dishonor to the faith they professed. He took pleasure in reading books of devotion, and with these his library was well stored.

Beatrix Davila y Ahumada, Teresa's mother, with extraordinary beauty possessed excellent gifts of mind. "She had a sweet disposition, and a bright intellect," writes her sainted daughter, "and was remarkable for her prudence and modesty."

In Saint Teresa, her father's strong faith and religious earnestness were mingled with the mental gifts and graces of disposition and person which distinguished her mother. Although the little girl was naturally of a lively and impetuous character, yet in her very merriment she showed a certain seriousness of manner, which earned her among the friends of the family, while she was still a mere child, the quaint title of the "Wise and Discreet Matron."

When she was only seven years old, the enjoyment Teresa most relished was to read the lives of the Saints, the lessons of holiness she thus learned directing her earliest thoughts to God.

About this time occurred an incident in the little girl's life, which is characteristic of the future Saint Teresa of Jesus, and gives us a hint of the ardor and courage with which in after years she devoted herself to the furtherance of God's glory.

II.

AMONG her brothers was one by the name of Roderic, about four years older than herself.—"I loved him best," she confesses, "though I loved them all very tenderly; and they loved me."—Roderic, who seems to have possessed something of the character of his little sister, was her chosen companion in her amusements, the Wise and Discreet Matron being accustomed to have recourse to him when in need of information or advice.

Together they read the lives of the Saints, and the two children would sit side by side for hours talking of the splendors of God's home and the happiness enjoyed by the Blessed. Teresa was much struck by the expeditious manner

in which the martyrs had earned their right to the happiness of heaven.—

“Do you not think, Roderic,” the little girl asked her brother one day, “that the martyrs were very much favored in being allowed to go to heaven by so short a way, and with so little trouble?”

“Indeed yes,” that very thought had often and often occurred to him.

“Only to think of it, Roderic! They shall see God forever and forever! and the bad people shall see him never, never!—And why cannot we also be martyrs? Roderic, let us go away some day, ever so far, to some place where there are infidels, and die for our holy faith!”

Roderic, catching inspiration and activity from his sister's enthusiasm, heartily approved of the project, and at once took measures to carry it out. It was agreed that the enterprise should be kept secret even from their father and mother, as they suspected it might be difficult to engage others to enter into their views.

The next morning, all preparations for the great undertaking having been completed,—the journey to Africa they knew would be long, so they had supplied themselves with a great bag of provisions—Teresa and Roderic hand in hand stole quietly away from home and soon reached one of the roads leading out of the city. Teresa's bright eyes danced with delight, as hurrying on they laid all their little plans. But, as they left home farther and farther behind them, Roderic's prudence began to suggest doubts as to the success of the enterprise. These, however, he kept for some time to himself, for fear Teresa might think he was becoming discouraged.

“After all, Teresa,” he ventured at last to say, “it will be pretty hard, I think, for us to succeed in becoming martyrs. How shall we find the country of the infidels?”

But the Wise and Discreet Matron had anticipated every objection :

“Why, first we shall come to the sea, then we shall cross over into Africa, and then we shall be in the land of the Moors, and they will kill us because we are Christians.”

“Yes, but may be the Moors will not like to kill us—and then, we are so little, you know, and they will not be afraid of us.”

“Oh yes, they will kill us, I’m sure. You know, Roderic, that the Moors are the deadly enemies of our Lord, and are always glad to put Christians to death, even the very littlest of them, for fear they should grow up and turn the Moors into Christians.”

“But how shall they know that we are Christians?”

“Why, we shall go and ask them for alms in the name of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and then they will say, this little boy and girl are Christians, and so they will take us and kill us, and then we shall be martyrs, and the angels will come and carry us straight to heaven!”

After this Roderic had no more objections to urge. He was the man of the party, and was resolved to comport himself with manly dignity; so on he marched with renewed courage, Teresa taking long steps by his side.

But the expedition into the country of the Moors, which had been so cleverly planned, was destined to meet with disaster. As the two martyrs errant were crossing the bridge over the Adaja, they were met by their uncle, who on

learning the destination of the travellers, refused all countenance to the project. He not only declined to join them, but, much to their discomfiture, would not permit them to go on by themselves ; and as this inflexible and hard-hearted man could not be won over by any argument or entreaty, there was nothing for it but to abandon the project of martyrdom, and turn home again with the best grace they might.

Meantime their mother had been a prey to the greatest distress, fearing that the children were lost. When their uncle led the two wanderers before her, he found her in tears ; but on the story being told, Donna Beatrix rated both of them roundly for the fright they had given her. * Roderic being the elder, had to bear the brunt of the scolding ; but he, like a true child of Adam, laid the blame on the woman, in which, of course, he was not altogether wrong.

III.

WE may well believe that little Teresa with her ardent nature, was keenly disappointed at the ill-success of her grand undertaking. But though she had been obliged to give up the hope of martyrdom, she still clung to the longing to see God, and she took up the lives of the Saints once more, to learn what other expeditious ways they had of reaching heaven.

As she read on, her mind became deeply penetrated with the thought that the bliss of the life in heaven was to last

* Roderic entered the army and while serving in South America was drowned in the Rio de la Plata. Saint Teresa always considered him a martyr, because he died in defense of the Catholic faith. Before he sailed for the Indies, he made his will and left all his property to Teresa.

forever, and stronger and stronger grew her desire to see God soon.

Even at this early age, the word eternity seems to have impressed her with its weight of meaning ; often she would sit for a long time together, unmoved by the things taking place around her, and repeat again and again : Eternity ! Eternity ! This thought of the eternity of heaven's bliss was continually breaking in upon her childhood's fancies.

The little girl's recent studies in the lives of the Saints convinced her that she could compensate for the lost crown of martyrdom, by imitating the ancient hermits in their solitude. Accordingly, Roderic was again called in for advice and assistance ; the result of the deliberations being that the two together took to building little hermitages in their garden, to which they used to retire to perform the exercises of devotion taught them by their parents. The operation of building, it may be added, was almost constantly going on, for the hermitages used to fall down, or require extensive repairs, almost as soon as they were put up.

IV.

THUS in innocence and piety passed the early part of Teresa's life up to her twelfth year. Here amid the artlessness of childhood we notice the first tokens of that sublime spirit of prayer which God gave his beloved daughter to lead her along the path to perfection.

She had a picture in her room which represented our Lord conversing with the Samaritan woman. Before this picture she would stand and gaze for hours at a time until she felt such a thirst for the living water as to be forced to cry out:

“Lord, give me of this water to drink!” The ardent prayer which fell from her lips in childhood was but the expression of a thirst which her soul was to experience all her life, till at last she should be permitted to enjoy the vision of God.

It was to gratify her thirst for the living water, her longing to reach God soon, that her earliest years were devoted, as we have seen, to exercises of piety. In after days the same thirst, the same longing, was to lead her ardent soul to the closest union with God.

Teresa’s intellect and temperament in any event would have made her a great woman; she became a great saint, because this intellect and this temperament, with all their forces, were directed heavenward, and kept in unswerving motion by a tender heart and a constant will.

The saintly maiden was about twelve years of age when God called her mother to himself. After the first burst of anguish at her loss, the little orphan, whose depth of feeling had not made it easy for her to bear so severe a trial, cast herself on her knees before an image of the Blessed Virgin, to implore her protection:

“Sweet Lady,” she prayed, “you see I have no mother now on earth; be a mother to me and make me your own faithful child.”

At this period, when she was just stepping into the years of womanhood, she stood most in need of a mother’s aid; that our gracious Lady listened to her prayer is fully shown by Teresa’s future life.

V.

SPAIN at this time was deluged with books of romance, which recited the gallant deeds performed by imaginary knights errant and their doughty squires. Teresa, always fond of reading, was captivated by these stories of love and feats of arms and bold adventure, and in consequence spent much of her time in perusing them.

Moreover, influenced by some giddy companions, cousins of hers, she relinquished one by one her practices of devotion, until the feelings of piety she had hitherto tenderly cherished found no longer a home in her heart.

"I began, too," she says regretfully, "to wear fine dresses, and to desire to appear handsome."

These little frivolities, proceeding solely from girlish fancy, were the occasion of bitter tears to her during her after life. Throughout her writings she continually bewails her great sins, calling herself a "wicked sinner."

Yet her confessors assure us that she never committed a sin grievous enough to deprive her of God's friendship. Indeed Teresa's pure and elevated mind could not easily stoop to the baseness of sin. Her self-respect and high sense of honor were a strong protection to her. She tells us that "even when she had lost the fear of God, still, the horror she had of losing her honor made her shrink from any grievous fault."

But nevertheless she had fallen from her old fervor, a fact which could not escape the watchful eye of her father, who, knowing the dangers that lurk along the path of girlhood, where every step may lead to misfortune, without the guid-

ance of a mother's tact, and firm but gentle hand, sent her to a convent school of the order of Saint Augustine, where ladies of her own rank were educated.

VI.

THE stillness of the convent life offered at first but few attractions to the spirited Teresa de Ahumada. But a noble character must eventually discover a charm in the life of prayer. The happiness that dwells in the cloister is born of peace with God, and no hearts can beat more happily than those which, in every ebb and flow of theirs, are meant to give special homage to God.

Teresa soon learned to love the bright faces of the Nuns; and the spirit of devotion that breathed throughout her new home fanned into life her own fervor, which had slumbered for a while, but had not died.

During her stay in the convent school she must have often recalled the fancies of her childhood days, when with Roderic's help she built the little hermitages and tried so hard to be an Anchorite; still her thoughts were now altered, nor could she persuade herself that she had a vocation to the religious life. But God was knocking for admission to her heart, and with the patience of love was waiting till she should give him entrance there.

After a year and a half spent in this convent, Teresa fell dangerously ill, and was removed to her father's house, from which, when her health grew better, she was sent into the country to live with her sister. On her way thither she stayed for a time at her uncle's house, where, being fond as ever of reading, she looked about for some books to while

away the time ; but finding nothing but works of a devotional character, she had to be content with these.

She took up the lives of the Saints, and as she read on, the old delight of her childhood came to thrill her heart once more ; once more the sublime thought of eternity cast its spell upon her mind.

“Verily,” she reflected, “all that earth can give will soon vanish ; but God endures forever and forever, and an eternity of bliss is in store for his friends !”

VII.

TERESA now felt herself drawn more and more towards the quiet life of the cloister, and her first inclination was to enter it without delay ; reason and clear judgment however, being uppermost in everything she did, forbade her in this instance to act from mere impulse.

Accordingly she spent three months in anxious deliberation, persuading herself with reasoning like this:—

“The trials and sufferings of living as a Nun can not be greater than the pains of purgatory, and I have well deserved to be in hell. It is not much to spend the rest of my life as if I were in purgatory, and then go straight to heaven.”

Finally, she resolved to become a religious, and to make known her purpose to her father at once, “which,” as she writes, “was the same as to put on the habit—so punctilious was I as to keeping my word, that after I had once said a thing, no power on earth could make me unsay it.”

Thus, if Teresa was deliberate in her efforts to discover the state of life to which she was called, she was also resolute

in following her vocation, once she had found it; if she could not be led by impulse, neither could she be deterred by feeling.

Accordingly, on meeting with opposition from her father when she made known her determination to become a Nun, she did not permit the tenderness of her affection to interfere with her resolve. She persevered in urging him to grant his consent, by arguments and entreaties of her own and by the influence of friends, until at last, seeing that he could not be brought to listen to any representation, she determined to carry out her resolution in secret.

VIII.

EARLY in the morning, on the feast of All Souls, in the year 1535, Teresa, then twenty years of age, went forth from her father's house to follow the call of God. She was accompanied by her brother, Antonio, who at her persuasion, was about to join the Order of Saint Dominic. The fugitive daughter of Don Alfonso entered the convent of the Incarnation at Avila, a house belonging to the Order of Mitigated Carmelites.

The Nuns welcomed her with delight, for such was her self-control that she succeeded in concealing every mark of agitation and manifested her usual gayety. When it was discovered that she had left home unknown to her father, word was immediately sent to Don Alfonso of his daughter's escape and of her desire to take the veil, even without the expectation of gaining his consent. Her father came to the monastery, and seeing her determination, no longer opposed her wishes. As the chronicle of the order quaintly says, he offered up his Isaac on Mount Carmel.

Teresa has told us of the anguish she experienced when thus coldly, as it seemed, she turned away from the scenes of her youth, from the friends who esteemed her, from the father who tenderly loved her :—

“I remember well,” she says, “and can affirm with truth, that when I left my father’s house, I suffered so much that I do not think that death itself can inflict a greater pain. It seemed as if my very frame were disjointed by the anguish I endured.”

God, however, was calling, and Teresa would obey, no matter how much her heart might bleed.

No sooner had Teresa entered upon her religious life, than every feeling of depression was charmed away, and every regret was turned into a delight. The convent life that had seemed so dark and cheerless when she looked upon it from the midst of the tumult and excitement of the world, now became soothing and grateful, so that on the day the young postulant received the habit of our Lady of Mount Carmel she felt a sweet content in her vocation, which she continued to experience for the rest of her life.

During the year of her noviceship she was subjected to severe trials and temptations; she became very ill, and now began those acute bodily sufferings with which Teresa was so much afflicted in after years. But the fervent novice endured patiently and cheerfully all the sickness and all the pain, and at the end of the year she made her profession.

IX.

TERESA was now a religious, solemnly pledged by vow to strive for what is highest and noblest. She was to try to be perfect as her Heavenly Father is perfect.

The following twenty years of her life exhibit a continual struggle, maintained between God's grace operating in her soul, and the stratagems of the evil one; between Teresa's bright intellect, and the shadows of doubt and fear; between a noble heart reaching towards the good and the true, and the feelings of nature, those strong tendrils, holding it fast to earth. Yet it was a struggle to which God gave a glorious issue.

The ardor with which the devout Nun entered into the penitential exercises of her religious life soon proved hurtful to a constitution already enfeebled by a severe sickness; about a year after her profession, she became utterly exhausted by her sufferings. No remedy could be found to give her relief. Her father, who loved her now more than ever, had her removed from the convent to a place where it was hoped she could receive more successful medical treatment; but she returned from this place to Avila worse than before, and went home to live with her father.

For some years she tried every means of re-establishing her health, with the hope that with strength restored, she would be better able to do God's work. But all her efforts proved of no avail, and she returned to the convent a helpless paralytic. Heaven at last came to her assistance, her cure having been obtained through the intercession of Saint Joseph.

X.

TERESA's society had always been much sought after on account of her wit, her amiable disposition and fascinating manners. Even now, during her convent life, she received many calls from ladies and gentlemen, much of her time being spent in conversation with visitors.

Her heart however could not be given to creatures, and at the same time be kept for God—she began to neglect her prayers, to feel less pleasure in meditation and devotional reading, to become remiss in her other religious duties. The remissness however did not continue long; after about a year's intermission, she renewed her devotions, without however relinquishing her dangerous habit of conversing with persons of the world.

But God knew the generous heart that beat beneath these human failings, and He came to her assistance.

One day as Teresa was standing near the convent grate talking with a person whose conversation, however entertaining, was not edifying or instructive, there arose before her the vision of an Arm, all gashed with wounds, and bleeding profusely. It was the Sacred Arm of our Blessed Saviour. Teresa knew its meaning.

That Sacred Arm recalled to her mind the suffering which our Lord had endured for her sake, its wounds upbraided her with the indifference she had shown in return for so much love.

The vision made a deep impression on her imagination; but still, in spite of her resolute endeavors, she could not teach her heart to turn away from those who loved her and whom she dearly loved.

XI.

Now why was it that that one so favored of heaven, one so devoted to the service of God, could experience such difficulty in avoiding occasions so productive of dissipation of mind? The answer to this question will give us some understanding of the elevated character of Teresa.

It could not have been that a woman of Teresa's intellect and culture cared for the gossip which is the delight of frivolous minds; nor could it have been that she found a need in herself for the entertainment afforded by the society of intellectual persons. She had ample resources of this nature in her own mental activity, and she had moreover the benefit of the conversation of her sisters in religion, many of whom, doubtless, were as gifted, and as well educated as any of her secular friends.

Again, it could not have been that in her intercourse with persons of the world, she found a better field for the employment of her wit and conversational powers. The vanity of this she would easily have detected, she would have been on her guard, and out of a spirit of humility and self-denial would have avoided any occasions that might lead to a display of her talents.

No, the reasons for the difficulty she experienced in detaching herself from her friends lay deeper than these:—Hers was a tender heart, a strong heart; hers was a loyal nature; where she loved fondly, she loved faithfully. To decline to see those to whom she had given her friendship, in her view, would have been to betray them and dishonor herself.

She had not yet breathed the high atmosphere in which she afterwards lived; from her present elevation her horizon was not so extended, and there were obstacles beyond which she could not see.—She thought she could reconcile two affections, love for God and love for those whom he loved and had commanded her to love.

She knew that God was inviting her constantly, urgently,

to a closer union with himself; but she could not fully understand how her intimacy with creatures, was a force which kept her apart from him. Why, she asked, could she not love God ardently, without reserve, and yet be true to those to whom she had given her friendship?

This was her difficulty and this was her temptation—not the less strong in that it did not proceed from a mere matter of feeling, but sprang from her reason, which demanded to be satisfied.

Our Saviour's answer to the difficulty is this: "He that hates not father and mother, yea and moreover his own life, can not be my disciple."—She could avoid betrayal of her friends and dishonor to herself by sublimating the carnal love into the spiritual, which seeks God in all creatures, loves God in all creatures, and loves all creatures in God.

But there was another difficulty. Herself she could easily school to suffering, but she could not bear to inflict a pang upon another.—When a call was made upon her by one of her friends, should she go to the parlor to meet her or should she not?

Her gracious nature revolted at the thought of doing what seemed a rude thing. Her inborn courtesy peremptorily commanded her to go.—For herself she could bear to be misunderstood. But why should she deny herself to her friend and inflict this pang?

To a woman of Teresa's nature, this was the very core of the conflict in which she was now engaged. But our Lord had answered this difficulty also, when he said to the disciple who had asked leave to go and bury his father: "Let the dead bury the dead; follow thou me;"—implying that

he should not care at all for the pang which his seemingly unfeeling conduct might inflict on his relatives and friends.

XII.

FOR twenty years she lived a life of divided purpose. On the one side she heard the voice of God calling, on the other, the less perfect life bidding her to stay. Upon her soul from time to time broke flashes which revealed the heights it was possible for her to reach. She made attempts to rise, only to fall again.

Still she never wearied of the struggle. She could not weary of it. Her endeavor to tread the paths of the higher life which God revealed to her was the necessity of her exalted mind. It was but the matured conception of the project formed by the little child of seven, when she left her father's house, and journeyed on in search of martyrdom, the price of eternal bliss.

Saint Teresa describes this part of her life in her writings, and speaks of the "great sins" she then committed. It is a habit of the Saints to exaggerate their faults into serious offences. The slightest imperfections, although, like motes, invisible in the duller light, showed well-defined and dark amid the radiant beams which illumined Teresa's conscience, and to her eye, they tarnished God's image in her soul. The Saints judge rightly of the heinousness of sin because their conceptions of God and his infinite perfections are most just. This keen perception of the wickedness of sin helped no doubt to awaken in her the feelings of remorse which she now began to experience.

Amid all her spiritual desolation, amid the vanity with

which she sometimes allowed herself to be flattered, Teresa loved God with a deep and abiding love. Without him, there was a void in her heart which nothing could fill. Thus, after short seasons of remissness, her heart turned back unerringly to God, in whom alone it could find true happiness.

During those very years which she afterwards thought over with grief, her life was one of holiness. Sometimes she passed many months (and once a whole year) without committing any offence against the Divine Majesty. At this same period there were times when she devoted many hours a day to converse with God. And in the fervor of prayer God came at last to take complete possession of her heart. Teresa has told us in her writings of what happened at that moment long desired:

One day, as she was entering the chapel, her attention was struck by a picture representing our Blessed Saviour covered with wounds. At the sight of the picture, which recalled to her mind the agony our Divine Lord had suffered for her sake, Teresa became filled with intense grief; then reflecting on the ingratitude with which she had repaid so much love, it seemed to her as if her heart would break with anguish. Throwing herself before the picture of her suffering Lord, she entreated him in a passion of tears not to permit her ever to offend him again:

“My Lord and my God,” she cried, “I will never leave thee till thou hast given me the grace I crave!”

The fervor of this prayer won the coveted favor.

“From that moment,” she writes, “I opened a new book, that is, I began a new life. The life I had hitherto

lived was my own; but that which I have lived since, I may say has been God's, for, as it seems to me, God has lived in me."

XIII.

MORE than forty years of Teresa's life had elapsed before she merited the surpassing graces which God was holding in his hand, waiting for her to come. But during all that time, from her childhood up, the blossoms of her virtue were unfolding their petals, were breaking into fuller bloom beneath the dews of grace.

Her faith had grown so strong that she never had even a temptation to doubt. Teresa was not merely a loyal daughter of the church, she was Catholic to the core, an ardent, enthusiastic Catholic. She never thought of putting God through a catechism, and questioning him with a how and a wherefore and a why-not. With a fine intellect, high sensibilities, and a cast of thought that was almost masculine, this woman had the artlessness of a child, the simplicity of a dove.

She used to say that the less her reason understood of a matter of faith, the stronger was her belief. It was not for men to ask how God could do this thing or that, but to hold it true that he can do all things, and to praise his omnipotence without seeking a reason for his ways.

From firm faith proceeds reverence for things holy. Teresa's Catholic instincts led her to honor the ceremonies of the Church, the divine office, and, especially, the most Holy Sacrament of the altar. The devout Nun, when permitted by her spiritual director, ordinarily communicated every day.

It was a saying of hers, that if when our Saviour was on earth, the sick were cured merely by touching his vesture with the tips of their fingers, with greater reason ought we who receive him in holy Communion, hope to obtain what we ask, since he comes to make his abode in our very selves.

The spirit of prayer for which she had thirsted so long was now presented to her soul in satisfying measures. Such was the perfection of the prayer made by the saintly Nun, that it has affirmed by men of learning and authority, that Teresa could have taught the science of Mystical Theology as well as the great Doctors have taught the other sciences.

No marvel, then, that to so apt a pupil in the science of things divine, God seemed to take delight in unfolding the secrets of heaven. Those sublime visions whose effects on the soul are described in her life, her revelations, her raptures, testify to her intimate union with God, and render her life a wonderful one even among the wonderful lives of the Saints.

XIV.

YET through this fair season of grace Saint Teresa passed not without her times of shadow. Suddenly came the startling thought:—Might not these very visions and raptures be the mere illusions of the evil one? Might he not design to entice her from her ordinary prayer or to frustrate her meditations on our Saviour's Passion?

Pious and learned men of whom she had asked advice, heightened the fear, by giving judgment, that one whose past life had been such as hers, was not probably conducted by

God's holy spirit. These visions, these raptures, these revelations of hers, were a delusion and a snare !

Sweet Saint of God, Teresa of the ardent heart, why should we pity you when we think that crushing words like these once fell upon your ears ? For even then the pang you felt must needs have brought your holy soul more joy than pain. Now, indeed, you were suffering for His dear sake, for whom your wish to suffer had been as long as was your life !

How little the good men who spoke such words knew of the beauty of that soul ! How little of her own sanctity the humble Teresa knew herself ! She, in her self-abasement, was almost persuaded that what they spoke was true : " It may be that for my great sins God has permitted me to be led astray." This was her thought at that moment, and this thought alone was enough to make her holy, if holy she had not been.

Her " great sins," too, she must in her humility, make a reproach unto her soul,—that soul so clear and pure, so gifted with divine grace that it might almost dare to turn its gaze upon the face of the Living Light !

XV.

THOSE counsellors of whom mention has been made, while condemning her visions as illusions, had recommended the Saint to ask advice from the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, who had recently established a house of their order in Avila. Teresa's timidity for some time restrained her from speaking to men of such repute for learning and sanctity, but finally she consulted Father Juan de Padranos, one

of Saint Ignatius' children. This venerable priest understood Teresa at once, assured her that the ecstasies and revelations were from the spirit of God, and advised her to persevere in her method of prayer.

Full of joy to find at last one who could assist her, the saintly Nun directed every endeavor to the following out of this Father's directions. Her love for penance and mortification increased.

It was not now enough for her passionate love of penance that she had borne with joy the sickness and the pain which hitherto had been her portion, although the suffering she had endured from sickness had been almost intolerable.

For during that illness into which she fell soon after her profession, she had borne the greatest agony for three months ; her suffering became so acute that for four days she lay insensible.

After she had regained her senses, her frame was bent together like a coil of ropes, her tongue was bitten almost to pieces, her throat was so inflamed that she could not swallow a drop of water ; she was unable to move arm, foot or hand, She had remained in this state for eight months and was a paralytic for three years.

All this suffering she had accepted with resignation, and (except at the beginning of her illness, as stated by herself) with great joy. Nay, she would have been resigned if it had pleased God to leave her in this state forever.

“To suffer or to die !” “To suffer or to die !”—This was the device engraven on her heart, the most frequent aspiration that breathed upon her lips. The thirst for suffering was an abiding one with her—Once when she was sick

in the hospital they placed her on a hard, rough mattress.—

“Ah, dear Lord,” exclaimed Teresa, “how soft and pleasant this couch becomes when I behold you hanging on the cross !”

XVI.

AT this period her soul was making eagle-flights into sanctity. It was like a strong bird soaring upward and afar, making higher and higher, till it almost swoons with the glory of the effort, the transport of the height it has reached, and the delicious excitation that comes from breathing the refined and purer air.

Her desire for suffering could not be satisfied. Arming her hand with vengeance against what she called her grievous sins, she often seized a bundle of nettles, and with these scourged that debilitated frame ; again a great bunch of keys would be her weapon ; and when they would not suffice, she would fashion a whip out of iron chains.

When restrictions were put upon these mortifications by her ghostly father, she submitted at once. Obedience was better to her than victims. It was sweet to suffer, but better to obey, because obedience slays the will, a nobler victim than the fleshly sense.

Still, to Teresa of the ardent heart the thought of the penances that might be performed was a tempting one. Her spirit began to chafe under inaction. Was it not better to be suffering something, anything, for Him who had crowded so much agony for himself into one night and day, and had borne it gladly for her sake, and out of his own dear veins had paid the price of her soul ?

Not so ; — for, in the first place, to Christ the Creditor, the

princely creditor, the warm will to pay, which comes from a grateful heart, is more agreeable than any actual payment made for a debt which, after all, no sum can cancel; and again, was not the prohibition to suffer, the greatest of all sufferings, to one whose heart could frame no wish but one,—“To suffer or to die!”

And this truth our Lord was graciously pleased to make known to her by his own sacred lips: My child, you are walking by the right way; dear to my heart is your obedience.

XVII.

IN 1559, four years after the coming of the Jesuits to Avila, Teresa placed herself under the direction of Father Balthasar Alvarez, a member of their order. This saintly man, who by education and experience was qualified to guide a soul in the higher life, encouraged the Saint and urged her to more intense striving for perfection.

“Omit nothing,” he said, “that if done would please God. Let no particle of the good gift pass by. Nothing is a trifle that is done for God; its noble end magnifies and exalts it.”

Under his guidance all her forces were put in motion. After twenty years of warfare she won the victory over her own heart,—whose very nobleness had almost given it the power to destroy.

Teresa's generosity might have been her bane. From Father Alvarez she had learned, at last, not to endeavor to uncoil with pitying fingers the tendrils of affection that bound other hearts to hers, but to tear them rudely off, and let others fare as best they might—The dead should bury their dead. As for her, she should follow Christ.

In reference to Father Alvarez and his manner of direction with regard to the particular friendships she cherished at this period, Teresa writes:

“He was very prudent and very gentle at the same time; for my soul was not at all strong, but rather very weak, especially as to giving up certain friendships, though I did not offend God by them: there was much natural affection in them, and I thought it would be an act of ingratitude if I broke them off.”

She thought not of herself at all, nor of the pain it would cost her, she thought only of those others; for there is more meaning beneath the lines she writes than is conveyed by words designed to hide her virtues.—How those who knew this woman must have revered her for her loyalty and high sense of honor!

“He told me,” she continues, “to lay the matter before God for a few days, and recite the hymn, *Veni, Creator*, that God might enlighten me as to the better course. One day, having prayed for some time, and implored our Lord to help me to please him in all things, I began the hymn, and as I was saying it, I fell into a trance — so suddenly that I was as it were carried out of myself. I could have no doubt about it, for it was most plain. This was the first time that our Lord bestowed on me the grace of ecstasy. I heard these words:

‘I will not have thee converse with men, but with angels.’”

She was at last free. From that day forth she had courage so great, she says, as to leave all things for God. Then she speaks plaintively of how she had tried before to give up these friendships, and how the pain the trial had cost her was

so intense that she abandoned the attempt, on the ground that there was nothing unseemly in such attachments.

And mark the blessing that came of the sacrifice :—" It did a great deal of good," she says, " to those with whom I used to converse, to see my determination."

The Heavenly Bridegroom had said:

" I will not have thee converse with men but with angels:" And Teresa strove henceforth to make her life a blessed intercourse with God and the pure Spirits who in all things do his will.

XVIII.

THAT her efforts to reach this perfection would meet with opposition, it was natural to expect ; for her wrestling was not against flesh and blood (these she had reduced to subjection) but against the fallen powers, the dethroned principalities and all the cast-away cohorts who followed Satan's doom, and who follow Satan's lead against the favorites of God.—The dishonored spirit whose effrontery had dared to tempt the Christ himself, the holy one of God, will not stand abashed before the soul of Teresa, however pure it be.

It is hard to find among the Saints one other for whose footing so many meshes were woven.

Her soul being in fetters, (on some occasions for two and three weeks), lost all control over itself, and all power of thinking of anything but absurdities, things unsubstantial, disconnected, inconsistent, which only stifled it. At times, she says, the devils seemed to make a football of her soul. Her confessors treated her during these seasons of aridity with the greatest harshness ; their words were the most

offensive that could be borne with in confession. All the while not one sunny ray pierced through from heaven.

In the difficulties which now confronted Teresa, God was perfecting her obedience. Once more the cry was raised that she was the plaything of illusions ; she was deceived herself and was deceiving others. Father Alvarez, who knew her heart and mind and soul, strongly defended her ; but many others, and among them some men whose judgment she esteemed, pronounced her visions to be the tempests of an overcharged imagination.

A good priest, who sometimes heard her confession in the absence of Father Alvarez, assured her that beyond a doubt she was being deceived. He commanded her to make the sign of the cross whenever she had such visions — they were unholy things.

This then was what she had to do:—when the Lord the Most Holy with his divine graciousness should manifest himself to her, she was to cast him forth by the sign of his very own blessed cross ! .

Did she obey this command ? In very truth she did. Worthy daughter of the Catholic church ! Spouse of Christ most pure ! You knew that to obey was to walk hand in hand with the spirit of light, you knew that obedience to those constituted by the Church to guide your soul, (whatever else might be real or unreal in heaven above or in the earth beneath), was the Angel who should lead you along the dark ways, and among evil places ; and that in his strong arms he would lift you up, lest you might dash your foot against a stone !

But Christ could not be thrust out by the Christian sign.

—He was pleased ; he smiled graciously at his daughter's obedience ; and one day he assured her that he would teach those who misunderstood her to know the truth.

XIX.

Too much can not be made of this obedience of Teresa's. It was the touchstone of her sanctity. Father Alvarez said to one of his penitents :

“Observe Teresa of Jesus ;—with all the favors God has bestowed upon her, she is as obedient as a child to all my commands.”

Once, she had learned in a revelation that she ought to remain in the house in which she then was, until a certain matter of business of great importance should be brought to a settlement. About the same time her Provincial superior, while on a visit to the house, ordered Teresa to prepare immediately for departure to another residence, some distance off.

“Do you not think then, Father, it would be better for me to remain here for the present ?” said Teresa, after alleging some reasons of expedience, and mentioning finally the revelation she had received.

“Nay, Mother,” replied the Provincial, “it were better in my opinion to depart immediately.”

Without another word, Teresa began her journey. Afterwards the Provincial inquired of the Saint—

“Did you not say, Mother, that you had learned from revelation that some matter of business in which you are deeply interested, ought to have been settled before leaving your former residence ?”

“Yes, Father, so it was revealed to me; but in following a revelation, I might possibly have been deceived, while in obeying your reverence, I cannot be deceived, since you are my superior.”

This then is the situation:—Heaven counsels her to do thus. A mortal man commands her to do not thus. She obeys the mortal man, because he is constituted her superior by heaven. She is right. Nor is the mortal man, her superior, wrong. He does not know for very truth that the woman on whom he lays the command is a Saint, and empowered by heaven to let him know heaven's will. On the other hand, his commission is from God, without a doubt; and he cannot be superseded thus by a private revelation; for God's ordinary Providence gives an official sign of its will.

But Teresa's Provincial, whether living in heaven, glorious, or on earth still detained, weighted with years and venerable for long service—Teresa's Provincial saw the day of her canonization, and a sense of awe must have thrilled his soul, when he thought of the time when he was dealing so familiarly with holiness, and in simple faith was setting aside the counsels of heaven.

XX.

Obedience, courage, constancy, these three won. Teresa passed her days of trial with added lustre to her virtues.—Put iron in the fire, and the rust burns away and leaves the metal pure on the surface, as it is true in the core.

Formerly Teresa had attracted by the fascination of her manners and conversation; hereafter she is to win hearts

to God by the holiness of her example and her enthusiasm in the service of heaven.

Teresa would gladly have spent the remaining years of her pilgrimage on earth in the quiet of her convent home, since with it was linked all of her life that she now cared to remember. But the time had come for the peaceful flow of the convent days to be ruffled. During all these years God had been strengthening her for a career of action.

At the very time when Luther was loudly proclaiming his apostasy, at the time when the sanctities of the cloister were most grievously outraged, God was preparing Teresa of Jesus for the work of restoring the whole order of our Lady of Mount Carmel to its primitive fervor.

Shortly before this period (we are now in the year 1560, and Teresa is forty-five years old) the Saint had been more than once favored with a vision, which she thus describes:

"I saw an Angel very near me, on my left side, in bodily form. I saw that he held in his hand a long golden dart, tipped with blazing fire. With this I thought he pierced my heart several times, and I remained wholly inflamed with a great love for God."

With her heart thus glowing, with her soul enraptured by glimpses of God's unspeakable Majesty, she longed for some means of increasing his glory.

The order of our Lady of Mount Carmel, to which Teresa belonged, was not at this time following strictly its ancient discipline. Its members were living in the manner authorized by the Bull of Mitigation. Teresa often thought of the old days when it had not seemed hard to the children of Mount Carmel to follow closely in the footsteps of their

holy founder, and for a long time she cherished the thought that it might be possible to introduce the primitive rule among some of her Sisters. To this thought she never ventured to give expression, and its first suggestion fell from other lips.

One day the nuns had gathered together for their usual recreation. In a group apart were a young lady not yet a Nun, called Maria de Ocampo, niece to Teresa ; Teresa herself, calm and cheerful, "her deep eyes beautiful with looking upon God ;" and a young Carmelite Sister, an intimate friend of Teresa's niece. During the course of their conversation the Saint said playfully,

"Ladies, it seems to me—of course I say it under your kind correction—that the life we are leading in this convent is not so strict as we might make it. There are too many of us together, I think, and we seem to be in each other's way."

"Well, my dear Aunt, why can not we be off, we three, and begin a life of more austerity, and be like the ancient anchorets?"

The words were meant merely for pleasantry, and after amusing themselves with the thought, they laughingly set about forming schemes for carrying it into execution. In the end, however, the matter took a serious turn, and they spent the whole night in discussing the project :

"If we could live like the Discalced Sisters of Saint Clara," said Maria de Ocampo, "there would be no difficulty in obtaining the means to carry out our plan. I, for my part, my dear Aunt, promise you a thousand ducats towards the erection of a convent."

XXI.

BUT Teresa had resolved to take other and higher counsel. She committed the matter to God.

"One day," she says, "after Communion our Lord commanded me to labor with all my might for this end. He made me great promises,—that the monastery would be certainly built; that he would take great delight therein, that it should be called Saint Joseph's, that Saint Joseph would keep guard at one door, and our Lady at the other; that the monastery would be a star shining in great splendor; that though the religious orders were then relaxed, I was not to suppose that he was scantily served in them,—for what would become of the world if there were no religious in it?—I was to tell my confessor what He commanded me, and that He asked him not to oppose nor thwart me in the matter."

Teresa soon perceived that the undertaking was not a slight one. The whole city opposed it. First came murmurs of disapproval, then from all sides jeers and laughter. All exclaimed against it for a piece of folly. Finally the clamor became so loud that the Provincial would not permit Teresa to proceed any farther. Her confessor wrote to say that the scandal her project had occasioned proved it to be only a dream.

She gave up God's work at the word, and sat with folded hands, and tried to think it was in truth a dream.

But had not God himself promised her that the work should be accomplished? Ah, well, if that vision were true, then God would bring all to pass in his own best way. For

joy or for grief she was ready, always the handmaid of the Lord.

That the reform was really the work of God was soon made known. Our Lord again appeared to Teresa and commanded her to proceed. Her confessor's disapproval was withdrawn. A house was bought and Teresa immediately fitted it up for a monastery. Permission came from Rome to place her community under the obedience of the Bishop instead of the Provincial.

Everything being in readiness, on Saint Bartholomew's day, in the year 1562, the first monastery of Discalced Carmelites was founded at Avila, bearing the name and under the protection of Teresa's special patron Saint Joseph.

She of the ardent heart, it may be permitted to think, allowed herself to taste for a while the joy of her new home, and rested with the kind of rest the Saints are wont to take on earth, whatever kind that be.

To crown Teresa's joy, that very day she saw the Most Holy Sacrament placed in the little chapel; and before the altar knelt the first fruits of her prayers—four young ladies asking for the habit of our Lady of Mount Carmel.

XXII.

WITH the foundation of this monastery began the work from which we are to form our estimate of Teresa as a woman of genius.

In our present speculation Teresa may be a saint or she may not—we are taking a secular view of her abilities, just as one might go about estimating the intellectual forces of such women as Katharine de Medici, or Isabella the Catholic.

She succeeded. So far, well. But success in its own bareness is not a proof of ability. Success is thrust upon some men ; the able men are those who win success. It is, however, a test and proof of ability, if it is the result of means so well chosen that, in the ordinary course of things, they will compel the desired issue.

This is especially the case if success had seemed in any particular instance, a remote, unlooked-for thing, and is gained notwithstanding by legitimate, easy methods, without much wear of mind and with an aspect of repose. When King Cheops put the last stone on his pyramid, it must have been a delicious enjoyment to every master workman on the ground, to see the immense block hoisted home, and fitted into its socket,—without undue friction, without straining of gear, or creaking of apparatus, without even so much as a nick being made in its nicely chiselled edges,—as easily as if it were the last piece in a child's puzzle.

Now this ease in the working, this delicacy of adjustment in the materials, this repose in the builder, were conspicuous in the manner of carrying out the reform of Mount Carmel. Everything that Teresa did in the founding of Saint Joseph's, seemed to have been planned with unerring foresight.

The house was purchased — her sister's husband and family were induced to occupy it as tenants for a while, to prevent suspicion — the building was fitted up as a convent. It was necessary that Teresa should be on the ground to direct the workmen — and she managed to be there in such a way that it would have seemed unnatural for her to be anywhere else at that time.— Observe, that to get leave to be

absent from her own convent was an easy thing, for at this period strict enclosure, as we have seen, was not of obligation among the Carmelites.

Then a chapel had to be built, and the workmen were not to know what they were building — the rule of the new institute had to be approved, and it was approved from Rome by a Brief of Pius IV.— the Bishop of Avila had to be persuaded to accept a community which had no revenue, and by its constitution could accept of none — Novices had to be invested with the habit of the Reform:

In a word a religious order had to be restored — it would be perhaps safe to say, a new religious order had to be erected — all without excitement, without noise, without the knowledge of Teresa's Prioress or her other Sisters in religion, or her Provincial or her fellow citizens of Avila, each and all of whom, if they had known what was going on would not have allowed a tittle of it to come to pass.

Moreover, all this had to be done by legitimate means. Teresa took no step that was not in strict accordance with law, with her rule and her vows of obedience and poverty. She had taken the best advice from canonists and spiritual counsellors — They judged that she might go on with all secrecy, because what she was doing was for the good of the whole order.

If these authoritative advisers had told her that there was any, even the least imperfection in the course she was pursuing, she would have given up the founding of a thousand monasteries. This woman would have delivered her body to be burned, or to be dismembered by wild horses, rather than offend God. Once before she had given up the work

at one little word from a superior — her conscience had not grown less sensitive since then.

XXIII.

FOR a day or two after the establishment of the Reform at Saint Joseph's nothing was said against it. Perhaps people were holding their breath at the audacity of the attempt. But there was a brewing haze in the air, and the storm came at last.

Her own Sisters in the old monastery, who had loved her so much, were indignant, and exclaimed against Teresa in terms not measured —

“She had insulted them by attempting to found another monastery with stricter enclosure — could she not serve God as well among them as elsewhere? She wished to make herself a name. How could one who had not kept the rule in that house pretend that she would keep it better in another convent of stricter observance? She was setting up novelties, giving scandal in the city — she ought to be sent to prison !”

Keep the phrase in mind — she ought to be sent to prison! — spoken, remember, by women who had loved her, who had revered her. It tells better of how much Teresa suffered, than it tells of the heart-burning which had been enkindled against her, or of the opposition which she had to endure.

Some defended her — weakly, it must be confessed.

“Ah, their poor Teresa !—True, it was strange that she should act in this way, but they were sure she had done what she believed to be the best. Everything would turn

out right. She would give up this freak of hers, and come back to them and be their beloved Teresa once more."

See, her sanctity had not touched even those who loved her most. She was so gay-hearted that her holiness did not awe.

The Prioress summoned her back from Saint Joseph's—She was to come immediately. She came, and the Prioress was won over?—The Provincial had been called to the scene—again Teresa was sent for. She came, and the Provincial was won over. On her way to meet him she had laughed gaily as she thought of the mine she had exploded under them all. The Provincial commanded her to explain her conduct before the nuns. She explained, and the nuns were won over.

Meantime the outcry in the city became louder and louder.—Strange reading this, about a country so intensely Catholic as Spain—A mob had been gathering, they had surrounded Saint Joseph's, their proceedings were becoming riotous. Law abiding shop-keepers left their wares, workmen their tools, to protest against the new monastery. Out from the lanes and alleys came irresponsible citizens to hoot, and provoke breaches of the peace.

Such excesses are almost inconceivable. It is a fact that some of the men of Avila had pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor not to allow the new convent to stand!—What then was the abomination? What ground for this display of solemn valor? Why, simply this—It was feared that the new monastery, not being endowed, would become a charge to the city! "What! Nuns without dowries! Do they want to live off us?—The beggars! Do they think we shall let them be thrown on our hands!"

The mob were for tearing down the house. They cursed Teresa, and they cursed her novices, and they cursed all who had aided and abetted her, until they grew tired. Then, for recreation of mind, they cursed her fathers back unto the third and fourth generation, and all her existing relatives, lineal and collateral.

But Teresa was in legal possession. She felt convinced that if they forced her community out now, they would have to lead them back some day with honor.

Meantime the Governor, the Mayor, the City Council, the Theologians—two from each religious order in the city—lawyers and principal citizens had met. It was resolved to have the new monastery torn down. Only a single voice was raised against the execution of the decree—the voice of Father Bagnez, a Dominican,—and the brave voice prevailed. Let this be handed down to his eternal honor,—not that his voice prevailed, but that it was lifted up alone against a city's infamy.

The mob was still continuing its attempts to frighten the authorities into extreme measures against Saint Joseph's. The Governor entered the new monastery and ordered the four novices out.—Teresa had put heart into these girls, and during the wildest demonstrations of the mob they had not blenched—Instructed by Teresa they stood firm before the Governor, and replied that they would not leave the house until they should receive a command to do so from the Bishop.

This satisfied the Governor, he dispersed the mob, allayed the excitement and sent the matter of the new foundation to the courts.

What had Teresa been doing during all this time ?

If the aim of the question is to discover what was her mental state the answer is easy enough:—One thing she did, which shows what manner of woman she was better than a volume. To her friend, Madame de Guyomar, then at Torre, she wrote a letter (a sprightly letter it is) asking that lady to buy her a bell and some missals for the new monastery of Saint Joseph's !

XXIV.

THE Servant of God lived in this Monastery of Saint Joseph for about five years. These years she held to be the happiest of her life. God was still leading her onward along the path of perfection, still teaching her new truths, still bestowing his wonderful graces in visions and ecstasies.

During her stay in Saint Joseph's she finished the history of her life, which she had begun by order of her spiritual director.

This, however, is not the only gift we have from her pen. In the midst of her engrossing occupations she found time to write several other works, in which she makes known to us the sublime lessons which God himself had taught her.

Of these writings Darras says in his History of the Church: “ ‘The Way of Perfection,’ ‘The Interior Castle of the Soul,’ her ‘Life,’ written by herself, and her ‘Poems,’ will always be in the hands of those who strive to ascend the height of christian perfection.”

But the ardor with which she sought God's glory did not allow her to rest contented in the easy life at Saint Joseph's. In this one heart were burning a seraph's love and an apostle's zeal. In the end she died of this love and zeal. The

Church, in the hymn on her feast-day, cries out to her with suppliant hands: *O Charitatis Victima!*

Teresa means Fire.—Was it by inspiration they gave her that name at her christening? He, her divine Master, with his Sacred Heart all glowing, came to cast the fire of God's love upon the earth, and his one wish was to set the world aflame. This, too, was the one wish of his handmaid, Teresa of the ardent heart. "I must help him," she thought; "I must help him," she was always thinking. Oh, if it had lain with her, indeed, indeed God would have been known and loved over all the world!

"What matters it," she would exclaim, "if I should remain in purgatory till the day of judgment, provided that by my pain I could win one soul to God!"

These good desires were seconded by good deeds. She made a resolution never to let a day pass without performing some act of charity. In pursuance of this determination, she daily offered prayers and acts of penance to God for the conversion of sinners and for the relief of the souls in purgatory.

A friend of hers who had departed this life once appeared to her and said:

"By thee I have been saved."

And God revealed to her that her own father was to be saved through her intercession. On one occasion she offered all the good works of her life for a soul in purgatory, and at that instant she beheld the soul ascending into heaven.

Providence was now about to allot an ampler space for her zeal to range in. As she was kneeling one night in

prayer, entreating our Lord to show her some means of extending his glory, she heard these words from heaven:

“My child, wait a little while and you shall see great things.”

XXV.

ABOUT this time the General of the Carmelites came to Avila. Learning from Teresa the true account of the manner in which her convent had been established, and seeing the fervor of the primitive rule renewed in her children, he not only gladly gave her leave to found other such monasteries, but even encouraged her to institute as many as she could.

Freed from all restriction, she was now permitted to follow the guidance of her zeal. Although well advanced in years, she did not shrink from any hardship. The Reform was rapidly gaining ground. From all parts came letters requesting her assistance, each place urging her most earnestly to come and establish the ancient rule of Mount Carmel. The dawn of the great things had arisen. Her continuous journeys gave her no time for rest. All around her she saw springing up enclosed gardens of prayer, in which have been nurtured some of the fairest growths of virtue that have ever bloomed on earth.

That her self devotion would pass unblamed could not be expected. While she was carrying the torch of the Reform from place to place and touching the religious houses into flame, some persons became blinded by the brightness and averted their faces; others were scorched by the heat, other some were frightened.—These wanted the blame to

be extinguished, for fear it should reach themselves. For their part, they were reformed enough, they thought.

“These are novelties !” they exclaimed — a most effective fling this, especially in Spain, about the time of the Reformation; it was the same as to say: “Take care ! there is an odor of heresy here ! We do not like to see a person going about peddling new lamps for old !”

When they had said this, they had done more harm to Teresa than any argument with a basis of truth could have done. Verily, unless goodness and truth are set upon a mountain where all may see them, a clever sarcasm may cover them with oblivion or disgrace. For — do you not see ? — goodness and truth are too good and true to be uncharitable and answer with another sarcasm, giving as good as they got ; and if they attempt to make a calm statement or a well-reasoned argument in reply, why then — *solvuntur risu tabulae* — the court breaks up in a roar of laughter and their cause is lost.

Fortunately, Teresa’s holiness all might see.

“Again,” it was objected, “why could she not stay in her own monastery, where she would be better able to take care of her soul’s health, and permit other people, as good as she, to provide for themselves ?”

Ah, good, comfortable souls ! because she loved you more than you loved yourselves !

They urged once more, “that it was not becoming in a woman to be roaming about from place to place. — Could she not be content at least with introducing this Reform of hers among the Nuns, and let the Fathers alone ? Would not a man be better fitted for this work and for all the work ?

In fine, could not any one else have done all this as well as she ? ”

Why, here we have the old story again:—

“ In truth, good master Colombo, almost any man could have found the Indies as well as thou. I, for one, must even confess that I see nothing so startling in thy discovery ! ”

“ Nor I ! ”

“ Nor I ! ”

“ Nor I ! ”

“ Nor I, Senor ! ”

“ Caramba, Senor, nor I ! ”

—And so all around the table.

Then the man who had grown gray in his search for one other man (he at last found a woman) who would believe that the missing half of the world must be some where, took up an egg from the table :

“ Gentlemen,” he said, “ will one of you be pleased to make this egg stand on end ? ”

“ To be sure, nothing so easy,”— they saw in his eye that he could do it— and every clever gentleman seized an egg for himself, and began to make it stand—

But never ended with making it stand. “ They gave it up,— the thing was impossible ! ”

“ No, gentlemen, it is not impossible,” said the captain of the Santa Maria — “ give me an egg — ” (the eggs were scarce by this time, having been put to trials that brought yellow ruin) “ See, gentlemen, you take your egg, and crack it smartly thus— on the end— and then stand it thus— on the end ! ”

“ Ha, ha ! very good ! But what is that ?— a mere trick !

Why, we all could have done that, if we had only thought of it ! ”

“ True, gentlemen, if you had only thought of it ; and so too you could have discovered the Indies—if you had only thought of it ! ”

The Great Admiral's illustration was not at all apt, if meant simply to show his right to distinction. His discovery was born of genius ; and it was true that the setting of the egg to stand on end was only a trick. But as a piece of disdain, it was superb. Beside him, how little these men showed, shrunk too, as they were, by their envy !

Teresa could not show disdain. Though admirably gifted by nature and directly assisted by heaven, she did not despise the judgments of men. She gave long consideration to the objections made against her conduct, thus presenting to the Divine Majesty the pleasing sight of an humble heart.

XXVI.

BESIDES erecting numerous monasteries for religious women, Teresa, as has been hinted, extended her reform among the Fathers of Mount Carmel. This undertaking called into action all her prudence and courage. It was sternly opposed by a portion of the order, who were not willing to follow the ancient spirit, nor was it until many disheartening obstacles had been overcome that, by command of Pope Gregory XIII., the members of the Reform were allowed to hold a Chapter and elect their own Provincial. This measure brought about peace, and the Reform went on.

The work which Teresa took in hand and accomplished

can only be accounted for in her own way:—It was God's work. But it must be remembered that God chooses the instruments that are adapted to his Divine purposes.

Teresa was remarkable for her tact and good sense. We have seen some evidences of this, as well as of her practical talent. Other proofs occur on every page of the history of her foundations. While reading of her sublime prayer, her visions, her ecstasies, we may be tempted to regard her as one who was too far exalted above the plane of ordinary life to teach profitable lessons for human conduct. Sceptics will say that her life was a dream, an illusion.

Surely, that was not a dreamy sanctity under whose inspiration thirty houses of our Lady of Carmel sprang into being, under whose inspiration vigor was restored to a whole religious order which for years had been falling into decay. That was not a fanciful sanctity which bade a refined lady in feeble health to expose herself to rain and sun on long journeys—The mere riding in the coaches of those days over the Sierras would have been severe on fanciful sanctity. Fanciful sanctity after one trial in Teresa's wagon, which was built long before springs were thought of, would have made a vow never to permit its prayers to be jolted into the hiccough again! And fanciful sanctity would most religiously have kept that vow—Finally, that was not a deluded sanctity which braved the mobs of cities and enabled her to bear—a harder thing for this fond and sensitive nature—the coldness of those whom she loved.

Never in the most difficult circumstances did she lose that sweetness of disposition, that graciousness of manners,

which tell us the secret she herself could never fathom—*why every body loved her so much.*

It is hard to leave her and set down not one of her witty sayings, not one of her keen reflections on life and manners. What delightful anecdotes her companions on her journeys had to tell of her supreme good-humor, her spirit of fun, her *nonchalance*, her delicious incapability of being astonished at anything that might happen !

There is a story told of her which contains a pinch of seasoning from each of these elements. At the time she was attending to the establishment of the convent in Toledo, Teresa was one day kneeling at her prayers in one of the churches. She had retired all alone to a corner and had muffled herself up in her cloak, as she did not care to be recognized just then. A woman who had lost one of her pattens became convinced that she had been robbed by the suspicious looking form in the cloak; so she went up to the kneeling Saint who was still wholly absorbed in her devotions, and fetching her a smart slap with the odd patten, demanded back the missing property. In vain Teresa protested her innocence; in vain she tried to calm the claimant of the patten, for the sake of the sanctity of the place. The angry woman insisted on having back her own, and finally gave Teresa a touch of her quality by laying about her with her trusty Toledo, that is to say, with the patten which had lost its twin. Although Teresa caught several blows on the head, she uttered never a word through all the assault, and let matters take their course. When her people came to the rescue, she merely said, with a droll smile which may have had the slightest touch of ruefulness about it :

“Heaven preserve the good woman!—just as if my headache hadn’t been bad enough before she began!”

XXVII.

IN daring and bravery she was superior to most of her sex. With a woman’s thoughts she had a man’s heart. But the courage which she had from nature, she elevated into a virtue by reposing all her confidence in God. Thus she became a woman to be admired above measure, worthy to be remembered by all good men.

Once her party came to a bridge, the floor of which had been wholly submerged by a rising in the stream. To cross over was dangerous, for there was no telling what damage the flooring might have sustained; and yet, to go back was most inconvenient. Teresa resolutely faced the danger alone, and calling out to the rest of the party, “if I should happen to sink, you others must go back to the inn,” successfully passed over.

To vindicate the holiness of the religious life heaven did not fail to assist her in the time of need. Our Lord himself would sometimes speak to her, to console or direct her; at other times heaven would show by miracle that her mission came from above.

Only one instance can be set down here—The Saint with some companions had started for Veas, to found a monastery there. As they were crossing the peaks of the Sierra Morena they lost their way. The cliffs were treacherous and there was danger at every step. At last they came to a point where to advance was impossible, to go back was certain ruin.

“Mother, we are lost !” cried one of the Saint’s companions — “what hope of help can we have on these lonely mountains ?”

“My child,” returned the Saint, “we must look to our kind father, Saint Joseph, for help.”

Suddenly their prayers were interrupted by a voice calling from the highest peak:

“Stay where you are !—Advance, and you will be dashed down the precipice!”

“Tell us, good friend,” they asked, “how may we escape the danger ?”

The unknown guide then directed them along a path so narrow that only by miracle could they have succeeded in traversing it.

When at last all were safe, some of the party went to look for their benefactor. But Saint Teresa after a few moments said:—

“I don’t know why we permitted them to go off on this useless search. Certainly they will not be able to find any one. It was our good father, Saint Joseph, who directed us.”

Soon after, the party returned from the search, but could report no traces of the guide.

Not in danger only did Teresa show confidence in God’s help — She had been in Toledo for some time, waiting to begin the foundation of the convent there ; everything had gone wrong at first and she was in great straits. She took out her purse one day with a half-humorous, half-doleful air to examine the amount of her resources in ready money.

“One, two, three, four, five—five ducats,” she said, as she

put them back in her purse,—"not much, certainly. But then there is Teresa—well, Teresa and five ducats are not much more. Ah, but then there is God—and God, Teresa and five ducats—why that is a great deal!"

XXVIII.

WE have seen how a great woman lived ; let us now see how she can die.

Teresa was seized with her last illness at the convent of her order in Alva, on Saint Michael's day, in the year 1582. It is now the feast of Saint Francis. Teresa of the ardent heart lies dying, and every one in that chamber, except Teresa herself, knows that it is a Saint who will pass to-night.

This is she, the little girl of sixty years ago, who left her home and father dear, and mother dear, her young nerves all tingling with this one thought—to go and give her life for the holy Catholic faith and earn the right to see God soon ! During the long years since then she has been preparing for this hour, yearning for this hour, heaping hope on hope as she looked forward to this hour. Every striking of the clock had become a joy to her, because it told her of the coming of this hour.—Now for certain she shall see God soon ! O years of longing, how delicious are ye now, when all the weariness ye brought hath won more welcome rest !

This is she of the seraph's love, of the sublime prayer—But she does not build her hope upon the visions and the ecstasies with which God vouchsafed to favor her. The close communings of divine love with her soul were secrets be-

tween herself and God, and would never have been known had not those whom she was obliged to obey commanded her to speak. She now conceals most carefully every sign of intimate union between her soul and the Heavenly Bridegroom. Outwardly her death is almost homely—in this sense, that such a death may be seen every day in Catholic convents—only it is not so homely as was the death of him who died on Calvary for us all.

What then does she build her hope upon? Her own lips will tell us—these are the words she is continually repeating:

“Remember, Lord, that first of all and last of all I am a Catholic, a true daughter of the Church!”

She has received her last communion, she has received the last anointing. At the sight of the Holy Eucharist she had tried to throw herself upon the ground to do reverence to her Heavenly Spouse, and when she was about to receive him into her bosom she murmured :

“My Lord, my Spouse most dear,—Oh, come! The hour is here at last.—Ah, it is full time. It is only right that I should see you now, after the vehement desire which has been so long burning in my heart!”

This is she who made the vow in younger days to do always not merely what would be pleasing to God, but what she believed would be *most* pleasing to God. This is she who said with love imperishable:

“I could be glad to see another having greater glory than myself in heaven; but I know not whether I should be glad to learn that any one has a greater love for God than I have.”

What does she cling to most closely now that she is dying ?
—Tell us this, and we shall have the clue to the passion of
her life —

She holds a crucifix in her hands, her eyes are fixed upon
the image of her suffering Redeemer. The fingers are
tightly clasped about the cross ; she will not let it go ; they
cannot take it from her, until death comes to relax her hold
— she will not need it then.

And thus she died — first of all and last of all a Catholic,
a true daughter of the church !

Teresa of the Ardent Heart, Teresa, Saint of God,
farewell.



CONCLUSION.

BEFORE taking leave of you, my gentle reader, let me ask, if while perusing these beautiful lives you have not at times wished that your own life might be like them? Have not these perfect types of maiden heroism awakened now and then a slumbering ambition in your soul? Were there not moments when you seemed to envy them their unfading crowns and their imperishable thrones? It may be that you scarcely dared express such a feeling even to yourself, and yet it is a feeling most praiseworthy and one to be loved and cherished.

Yes, for you too, there is a high throne in heaven, one which belonged perhaps to some prince among the Angels. You are aware that God created numberless choirs of these pure spirits and destined them for a blessed immortality. Before enjoying it, however, they had to merit it by their submission and obedience to the divine will, and this thousands upon thousands of them failed to do. They rebelled and refused to serve, and God cast them out of heaven forever.

Not were these lost angels of equal perfection, or their thrones of equal glory and grandeur. They were classified into nine choirs, or grades of beatitude; and as many fell from every choir, so there are many thrones in every choir

now left vacant by the fall. Even the last and least angel in Heaven is more beautiful than all that you can dream of, or your fancy can paint, and yet his throne, compared to that of a cherub or a seraph, is no more than a peasant's cottage to the palace of a prince.

See what room you have here for hope ! what noble motives for ambition ! You can win not only the throne of an angel, but of an angel in the choir of the Seraphim ! Remember that the highest throne in Heaven next to God's is the throne of a virgin, a throne far above those of all angelic choirs, and one, too, from which you may expect great assistance in your efforts to rise to higher sanctity. Seated upon this throne you will find your model. "Look, and make according to the pattern."

Nor must you think that you are justified in your indifference, because so many whom you know make but little exertion to perfect themselves in the spiritual life. Turn your eyes, rather, upon those who have given their life and labor for God's glory and their own sanctification. See the vast number of religious orders and congregations for women, that are constantly doing God's work upon earth, and saving souls for Heaven ! Many of them were founded hundreds of years ago ; others have taken a more recent but rapid growth and in a short while have sanctified the lives not only of those who became members, but of many thousands whom they have educated and instructed in all the ways of christian life.

Now all their good work, all their virtues and holiness, which have endured so long and have spread so far, originated in the heart of some pious maiden or some

devout woman who was true to the inspirations of grace, and who founded and established an order or a congregation that her spirit of purity and of prayer might be perpetuated for God's glory and for the salvation of others. These foundresses of religious orders have won high thrones in Heaven. They were ambitious of glory and praise ; but it was heavenly glory, immortal praise. Can you not imitate them at least in some degree ? If young women, who were like you, have done so much, do you not feel that your life can be made of vast importance, and that nothing is wanting for success except energy and perseverance ? How many times you have made sacrifices gladly, when self-love or vanity demanded them ! Can you not do as much when God asks for them and promises you a crown of glory in return ?

Your life of holiness is a structure which must be built piece by piece, but so well built as in the end to remain compact and firm. Why is the marble mansion which you have sometimes admired, so strong and so enduring ? The material, though marble itself, can be broken by a single stroke ! There is no part of the edifice which, taken separately, cannot be easily destroyed ; and yet the whole stands secure through many decades of years. Why is it ? It is because it is based upon a good foundation ; because every single stone is well cut and squared and fixed in its proper place ; because all the parts are cemented together perfectly, and made to form a perfect work.

Now just so, your holiness must rest upon a true foundation — a foundation none other than the maxims of the Gospel ; your separate acts must be made perfect in themselves — squared according to the rules of duty which your

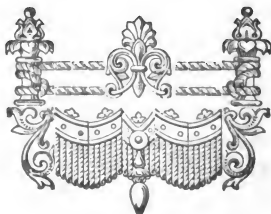
state of life requires ; and all your life must be cemented into a perfect work — made strong and secure by the bonds of charity directing all your actions to the glory of God, so that every thought, word and deed clings fast to the others, and helps to form a spiritual edifice which God cannot but love to behold.

Remember that all worldly display passes very soon. Sanctity alone remains forever ! The time will surely come when your appreciation of things will change. When you are on your death bed you will see that the world's vanities are all folly. The beauty of feature will be lost when the death-damp is on the forehead, and the eyes are fixed upon vacancy, and the hands are growing cold forever. Worldly display will lose all its attraction for you when you behold the world itself fading from your sight, or rather casting you away from its presence. That world which you have loved and served turns away from you in death, and leaves you alone in your helplessness, with only the works of a wasted life. Oh ! if you had only followed the divine calling ! If you had only served God with all your strength, and loved him with all your heart, how different would it be ! Nothing, then, would be lost which you love ; nothing would perish which you prize.

But you cannot live this perfect life without God's grace. He knows it well, and in his goodness he has appointed as your patrons of purity the highest Saints in Heaven. His holy virgin Mother will be your mother, and watch over that virtue which she herself so cherished. His foster-father, Saint Joseph, will protect you as he protected the virgin of virgins. And moreover, you have an angel that walks by

your side and guides your steps, lest you strike your foot against a stone. More than all, our Divine Lord Himself, in the sacrament of His love, is the very head of Angelic souls and the wine that maketh virgins.

Be earnest in your devotion to these, and in order that you may the more easily call upon their assistance, make yourself familiar with the prayers and practices which are subjoined in the little appendix. They will be of great service to you in time of temptation, and they will console you when the "night comes wherein no one worketh," for they will help to keep your soul undefiled and to fill it with beautiful virtues.



APPENDIX.

PRAYERS AND PRACTICES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HOLY PURITY.

A VISIT TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

Our Lord speaks to the Soul.

MY child, you need not know much in order to please me; only love me dearly. Speak to me as you would talk to your mother, if she had taken you in her arms. Have you no one to recommend to me? Tell me the names of your relations, of your friends; after each name, add what you wish me to do for them. Ask a great deal; I love generous hearts that forget themselves for others.

Tell me about the poor whom you want to help, the sick whom you have seen suffer, the sinner whom you would convert, the persons who are alienated from you, and whose affections you wish to win back. For all recite a fervent prayer. Remind me that I have promised to grant every prayer that comes from the heart; and surely the prayers are heartfelt which we say for those whom we love and who love us.

Have you no favors to ask for yourself? Write, if you like, a long list of all your wishes—all the needs of your soul—and come and read it to me. Tell me simply how self-indulgent you are, how proud, touchy, selfish, cowardly, idle; ask me to help you to improve. Poor child! do not blush. There are in heaven many saints who had the same faults as you; they prayed to me, and, little by little, they were cured.

Do not hesitate to ask me for the goods of body and mind—for health, memory, success; I can give everything, and I always give when the gifts would make souls more holy. What do you want to-day, my child? Oh! if you knew how I long to do you good!

Have you no plans to interest you? Tell me all about them. Do they concern your vocation? What do you think of? What would you like? Are you planning some pleasure for your mother, your family, your guardians? What do you wish to do for them?

And have you no thoughts of zeal for me? Do not you care to do a little good for the souls of your friends, of those whom you love, and who, perhaps, forget me? Tell me who interests you, what motive urges you, what means you wish to take.

Confide to me your failures; I will show you the cause. Whom do you wish to see interested in your works? I am the master of all hearts, my child, and I lead them gently where I please. I will place about you those who are necessary to you; never fear!

Have you nothing to annoy you? My child, tell me your annoyances, with every detail. Who has pained you? Who has wounded your self-love? Who has treated you contemptuously? Tell me all, and then say that you forgive and forget; and I will give you my blessing.

Is there in your soul a vague fear which seems unreasonable, and yet torments you? Trust fully in my providence. I am here, I see everything; I will not leave you.

Are there about you friends who seem less kind than formerly, who neglect you through indifference or forgetfulness, without your having consciously done anything to wound them? Pray for them, and I will restore them to you, if their companionship is good for you.

Have you no joys to tell me? Why not confide to me your pleasures! Tell me what has happened since yesterday to console you, to make you look happy, to give you joy. An unexpected visit has done you good; a fear was suddenly dispelled; you have met with unlooked-for success; you have received some mark of affection—a letter, a present; some trial has left you stronger than you supposed. All these things, my child, I obtained for you. Why are you not grateful? Why do not you say, —I thank you? Gratitude draws benefits, and the Benefactor loves to be reminded of his bounty.

Have you no promises to make me? You know I read the very bottom of your heart. Men are deceived; but not God; be frank.

Are you resolved to avoid that occasion of sin, to give up the object which leads you astray?—not to read that book which excites your imagination; to withdraw your friendship from that person who is irreligious and whose presence disturbs the peace of your soul? Will you go at once and be kind to that companion who annoyed you?

Well, my child, go now and resume your daily work. Be silent, modest, patient, charitable; love the Blessed Virgin dearly; and to-morrow bring me a heart even more devoted and loving. To-morrow I shall have new favors for you.

TO JESUS IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR.

I.

SEE where thy boundless love has reached, my loving Jesus ! Thou, of thy flesh and precious blood, hast made ready for me a banquet whereby to give me all thyself. Who drove thee to this excess of love for me ? Thy heart, thy loving heart ! O admirable heart of Jesus, burning furnace of divine love, within thy sacred wound take thou my soul ; in order that, in that school of charity, I may learn to love that God, who has given me such wondrous proofs of his great love. Amen.

(Indulgence of one hundred days, once a day.)

2.

DEAR Jesus, in the sacrament of the altar be forever thanked and praised. Love, worthy of all celestial and terrestrial love ! who, out of infinite love for me, ungrateful sinner, didst assume our human nature, didst shed thy most precious blood in the cruel scourging, and didst expire on a shameful cross for our eternal welfare ! Now, illumined with lively faith, with the outpouring of my whole soul and the fervor of my heart, I humbly beseech thee, through the infinite merits of thy painful sufferings, give me strength, and courage to destroy every evil passion, which sways my heart, to bless thee in my greatest afflictions, to glorify thee by the exact fulfilment of all my duties, supremely to hate all sin, and thus to become a saint. Amen.

(An indulgence of one hundred days.)

EJACULATION — My Jesus, mercy.

(An indulgence of one hundred days.)

O sweetest heart of Jesus ! I implore
That I may ever love thee more and more.

(An indulgence of three hundred days.)

TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

I.

MY queen ! my mother ! I give myself to thee ; and to show my devotion to thee, I consecrate to thee this day my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my heart, my whole being, without reserve. Wherefore,

good mother, as I am thine own, keep me, guard me, as thy property and possession.

My queen! my mother! remember I am thine own. Keep me, guard me as thy property and possession.

Hail Mary.

(An indulgence of one hundred days to those who say the above prayer, morning and evening.)

2.

REMEMBER, O most gracious Virgin Mary! that never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, and sought thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother! To thee I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O mother of the Word incarnate! despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

(An indulgence of three hundred days.)

EJACULATION — Sweet heart of Mary, be my salvation!

An indulgence of three hundred days.)

TO SAINT JOSEPH.

GUARD of virgins, and father, holy Joseph, to whose faithful care Christ Jesus, very innocence, and Mary, Virgin of virgins were committed, I pray and beg of thee, by these dear pledges, Jesus and Mary, free me from all uncleanness, and make me with spotless mind, pure heart and chaste body, ever most chastely to serve Jesus and Mary all the days of my life. Amen.

(An indulgence of one hundred days, once a day.)

EJACULATION — Saint Joseph, friend of the Sacred Heart, pray for us.

(An indulgence of one hundred days, once a day.)

TO THE ANGEL GUARDIAN.

Angel of God, my guardian dear,
To whom his love commits me here,
Ever this day be at my side,
To light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

(An indulgence of one hundred days.)



MAR 17 1954

